ELECTRONIC SOUND

THE ELECTRONIC MUSIC MAGAZINE

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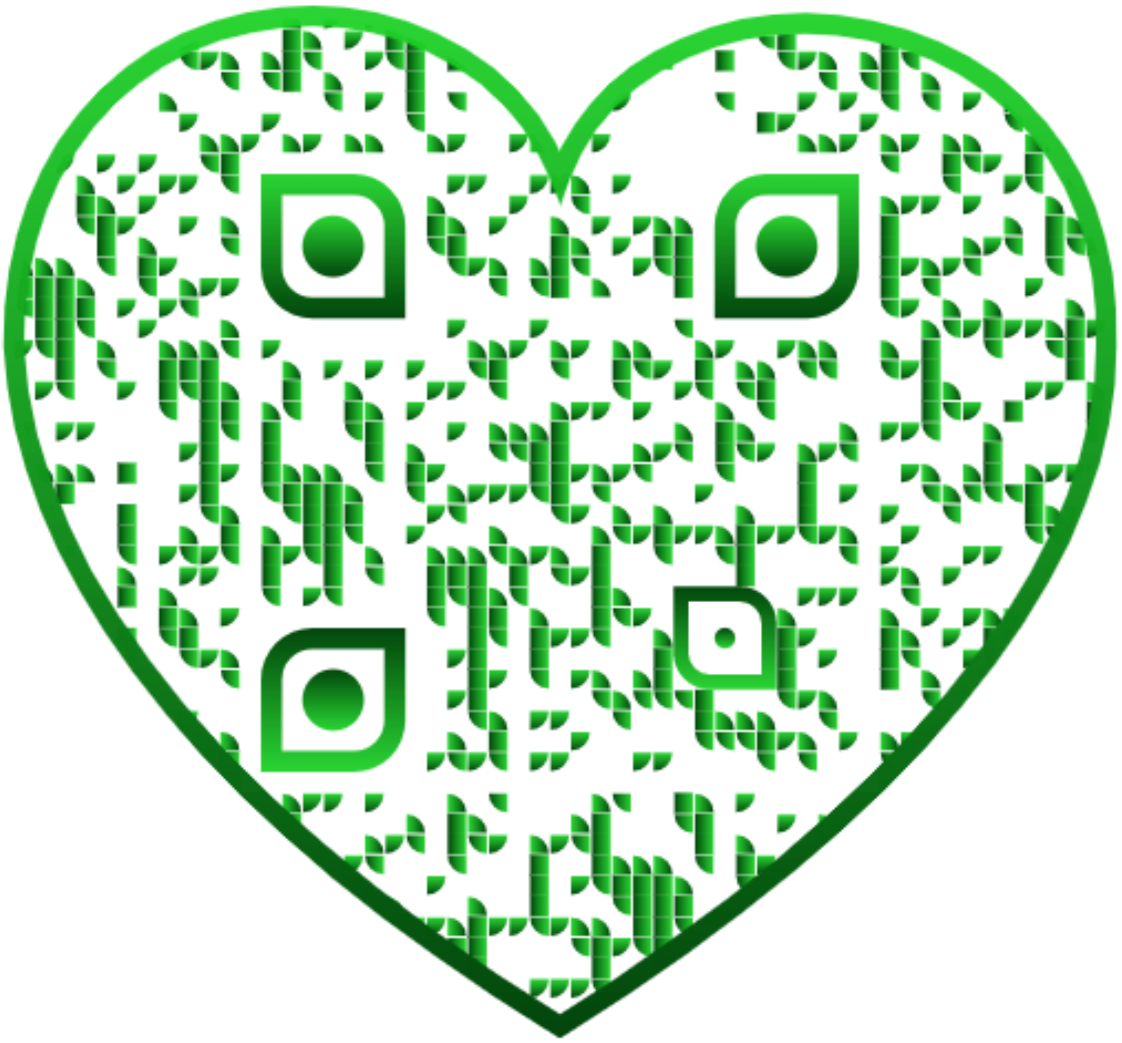
STEPHEN MALLINDER

THE DISCO DOCTOR

KARL BARTOS / KELLY LEE OWENS / EVERYTHING EVERYTHING / BILLY CURRIE / ALISON COTTON / GNOD

MAL CONTENT



91 WELCOME TO ELECTRONIC SOUND

EDITOR
Push

DEPUTY EDITOR
Mark Roland

ART EDITOR
Mark Hall

FEATURES EDITOR
Velimir Ilic

FRONT EDITOR
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A few years ago, I got into a conversation about Cabaret Voltaire with a guy at a hi-fi fair. After a couple of minutes, he mentioned to me that he'd been at school with Stephen Mallinder.

"There are three things I can tell you about him," he announced. "Firstly, he carried a copy of Roxy Music's debut album with him everywhere he went. Secondly, he wore make-up on his eyes, which was a bit unusual for a lad from Sheffield at the time. The third thing is he was really fucking hard, so nobody ever mentioned the first two things."

I don't know about that third thing – although his piercing stare suggests he's a man not to be messed with – but I'll wager the Roxy Music and the make-up stuff is totally true. Mal, as everybody calls him, talks about the impact of seeing Roxy on television in the early 1970s in this month's cover story, noting how it changed everything for him and his pals Richard H Kirk and Chris Watson.

Half a century on, Mal's own influence on countless electronic artists is immeasurable and our in-depth interview explores his role as an enabler and a serial collaborator. "That's the way that it always was for me," he says. He also lifts the lid on the years he spent in Australia after Cabaret Voltaire had split up – one minute he was training to be a teacher, the next he was spending all night locked in a garage with Shaun Ryder and a pint of sherry – and he speaks at length about his excellent new solo album, 'Tick Tick Tick'. He describes it as being "on the spectrum between The Jackson 5 and Terry Riley". We've put the opening track of 'Tick Tick Tick' on the A-side of this month's Electronic Sound seven-inch, with a track from 'Pow-Wow', his 1982 debut solo release, on the flip.

Elsewhere in the magazine, we talk to one-time Kraftwerker Karl Bartos about the long-awaited English version of his autobiography, 'The Sound Of The Machine'. It is, of course, sure to be one of this year's most essential books. We also ask Kelly Lee Owens to divulge her influences – from Enya to witchcraft to, er, gravy – and Ultravox keyboardist Billy Currie to discuss his solo back catalogue, which is currently being reissued by our friends at Burning Shed. We have Everything Everything, Alison Cotton, GNOD, The Beatmasters and Jimi Tenor too, plus a piece on Scottish musician Lomond Campbell, the inventor of weird and wonderful instruments such as the Harmonograph Synthesiser and the Unsung Machine. Batteries are apparently not included.

Since there's so much for you to read once you turn the page, I think I'd better let you get on with it. Time is of the essence, you know. Tick, tick, tick…

Electronically yours,
Push

EDITORIAL
editorial@electronicsound.co.uk

ADVERTISING
Chris Dawes
chris@electronicsound.co.uk

SUBSCRIPTIONS
electronicsound.co.uk/subscribe
support@electronicsound.co.uk

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CONTRIBUTORS
Jeremy Allen, Joe Banks, Ian Berriman, Joe Clay, Bethan Cole, Stephen Dalton, Flore Diamant, Bob Fischer, Ian Gittins, Carl Griffin, Jo Hutton, Jo Kendall, Andy Linehan, Neil Mason, Finlay Milligan, Ben Murphy, Kris Needs, Sharon O'Connell, Matt Parker, David Pollock, Fat Roland, Joe Silva, Dave Simpson, Mat Smith, Anton Spice, William Stokes, David Stubbs, James Thornhill, Anthony Thornton, Neil Thomson, Spenser Tomson, Ben Willmott

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SUBLIMINAL IMPULSE

The Northern Quarter, Manchester

24-26 JUNE 2022

WORDS: SPENSER TOMSON
PICTURE: PAUL WOLFGANG WEBSTER

The last time I saw Suzanne Ciani play live was three years ago, at the Semibreve Festival in the peaceful medieval chapel hotspot of Braga. Surrounded by an abundance of arches and architraves, her blissed-out music radiated like the warm Portuguese sunshine. Tonight in Manchester, where motorway underpasses and infinite skyrises replace Romanesque brickwork, she delivers a colossal and almost industrial set, before inciting a full-on stage invasion. Maybe it's this city or maybe it's the quadraphonic sound system, but the atmosphere is heavy. Thrillingly so.

Suzanne Ciani is the main attraction at Band On The Wall for the opening gig of the second Subliminal Impulse, a three-day festival taking place in Manchester's Northern Quarter. The event is the brainchild of Crispy Ambulance frontman, Scissorgun guitarist and all-round Manc legend, Alan Hempsall. "I think there's something in the water here," he tells me. "The things that have happened – the bands, the labels, the clubs… this place is founded on innovation."

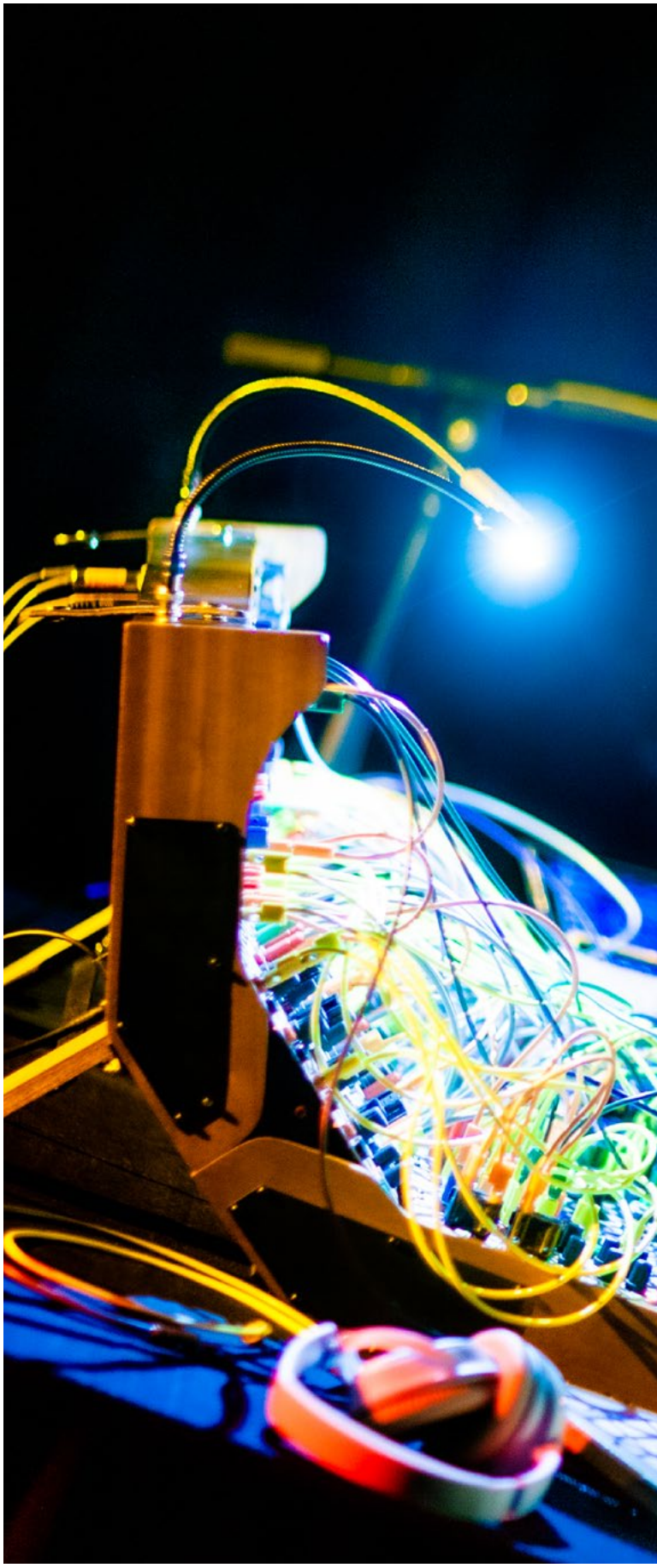
Inspired by the Red Light Jazz Festival in Amsterdam, Hempsall started Subliminal Impulse in 2019. Having missed the 2020 and 2021 incarnations – for obvious reasons – its return brings a sense of that innovation to a line-up that includes a storming Saturday night set from Adrian Sherwood's Tackhead Sound System, and an "Ambient Sunday" headlined by Scanner and Ian Boddy, as well as this performance from the American Buchla maestro.

Ciani is beaming as she walks onto the stage and approaches her Buchla 200e, the modern relative of the instrument she first explored in the 1960s. Within seconds of being at the dials, she casts sonic jets over the heads of the audience, pushing white noise into the corners of the room before launching it up to the ceiling. I notice a few people turning in awe, as if they can't work out the source of these quadraphonic sounds, but most remain transfixed by Ciani and the livestream of her synthesiser controls projected behind her. Working intensely over the machine, she resembles some kind of beatific bomb disposal expert, pulling at wires as an ambient electronic fanfare provides a tense soundtrack.

In Braga, the delicate sweetness of Ciani's music was the thing that really resonated, magnified perhaps by the quiet serenity of the setting. What stands out here are the points when she exchanges tranquillity in favour of an abrasive and strangely Mancunian heft. During her career, Ciani has mastered the Buchla, secured five Grammy nominations, designed the sound of cola cans opening, and been named New Age Keyboardist Of The Year by Keyboard magazine. But what this versatility doesn't illustrate is the sheer power she is able to conjure from her magic machine. As she nears the end of her set, we witness it in wide-eyed wonder, the whole room shaking like she's using a pneumatic drill that's been possessed.

And then, with the whip of a wire from one socket into another, she ceases the cacophony, bathing everybody in more waves of white noise to cleanse us from the previous moments of caustic pummel. Like the leader of some well-mannered revolution, Ciani raises her hands and invites the audience onto the stage so we can all see the tools that made this happen. As the synth-spotters swarm around the Buchla with huge smiles strapped to their heads, it feels like her performance hasn't just purified the room, but maybe also exorcised some of the stresses of the past two years.

"It's been such a difficult thing to do in the current climate – but never abandon hope!" says Hempsall as the venue starts to clear. After tonight's gig, I'm really glad that he didn't.



SUZANNE CIANI

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Stephen Mallinder
‘Contact’ / ‘Cool Down’
Green vinyl seven-inch

The one and only Stephen Mallinder talks us through the two tracks on this month’s exclusive Electronic Sound seven-inch – ‘Contact’ from his new album, ‘Tick Tick Tick’, and ‘Cool Down’ from his early 1980s debut solo outing, ‘Pow-Wow’

‘CONTACT’

“It made sense for me to select ‘Contact’ for the seven-inch because it’s the opening track of my new album, ‘Tick Tick Tick’,” notes Mallinder. “I guess it’s a flavour of what this record sounds like, but without giving much away. I think having two tracks from two albums that were released 40 years apart adds up to a nice little seven-inch vignette.

“This might seem rather pompous, but when I’m working with Wrangler, the lyrics and the themes are quite open. Whatever people might read into them is up to the listener, but they are generally of a social nature. Whereas with ‘Tick Tick Tick’, the lyrics are far more personal. They all have a direct connection to me.

“‘Contact’ is about someone I know who was dealing with body image issues and feeling the pressures of social media. It’s about how social media tricks us into thinking we have relationships with lots of people, but how it actually only gives us this faux contact. It puts pressure on people by making them believe they need to live up to the examples of how others present themselves. The person in the song was able to take control of the situation and make it right, so that was my thematic path. It’s about resolving issues for yourself, I suppose.”

‘COOL DOWN’

“I’ve been in ‘Cool Down’ world for a while,” says Mallinder. “It’s a track I’ve been wanting to play live for some time, but I’ve had to re-create it in order to do that. I don’t have the multi-tracks, all I have is the stereo master, so I’ve been working with Benge to record it again from scratch.

“I’d been trying to remember which drum machine I used on the original, but it was 40 years ago! We eventually figured out it was a Korg. There’s a little arpeggiator in the track which came from the clock-out on the drum machine. And it had to be the Korg because that’s the only model with that output. We then found a recording online of someone playing all the presets and managed to get two bars of a similar preset that’s used on the track. We used that to re-create the clock with the arpeggio on the Moog.

“‘Cool Down’ came out as a 12-inch before it appeared on my ‘Pow-Wow’ album. Talking about it makes me think of my mum, who loved the fact that I made music, although she never seemed to show any connection to the actual work I did. Still, not many parents would have got Cabaret Voltaire, no matter how broad-minded they were. My mum died about 10 years ago and when my sisters were going through her stuff, they discovered she had a copy of ‘Sensoria’ and a copy of ‘Cool Down’, both of them on 12-inch!”

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MOOGASMIC

Welcome to the family, Mavis

Following in the footsteps of the Grandmother, Matriarch and Mother-32, Moog's latest semi-modular offering is the charmingly named Mavis – and it's sized and priced rather charmingly too. This £339 compact synth ships as a solderless, easy-to-assemble DIY kit, and hosts Moog's trademark oscillator and filter circuits, a single octave mini-keyboard, a 24-point patch bay, plus Moog's first ever analogue wavefolding circuit. Compared to the 60HP Mother-32, the Mavis is about three-quarters of the size at 44HP, *and* significantly cheaper, and you only lose a couple of features like a CV input. Overall, it's a great addition to your set-up. **moogmusic.com**

PULSE

ΣTELLA

Azure alt-pop rooted in the traditional

WHO THEY?

Raised in rural Greece and now based in Athens, Σtella renders the catchy folky pop canon of her homeland with a contemporary electronic edge. Taking charge of vocals, bass, synth, guitar and drum programming (she's a painter too), Σtella cites a number of 20th century Greek stars as influences, but having recently teamed up with London producer Tom Calvert (aka Redinho), together they channel a shared admiration for Khruangbin, Altın Gün and Aris San into music that is timeless.

WHY ΣTELLA?

Her idyllic upbringing has imbued her with an openness and optimism that's rare these days. "Living in a close-knit community by the mountains and sea," she says, "I vaguely recall being woken by our neighbouring shepherd's sheep bells… everything back then was so pure and innocent!" That sense of unpretentious outpouring comes across in all her work, starting back in 2012 with the debut EP, 'Keep Me Naked', a brilliant interpretation of free-spirited mid-century Greek and American pop. After her self-titled debut album in 2015, her breakthrough came with 'Works For You', 2017's electropop beauty, which opened the door to extensive airplay, collaborations, and an invitation to soundtrack the athletes parade at the European Games in Azerbaijan.

TELL US MORE…

Billed as "a vintage pop-flecked paean to the pangs and raptures of love", her new album, 'Up And Away', is simply irresistible. Taking that 1950s and 60s classic pop era (with nods to The Chiffons and The Crystals), the soaring uptempo vitality of the title track is offset with sun-drenched languor on the sultry 'Nomad'. 'Manéros' and 'Another Nation', meanwhile, are rhythmically original yet classically rooted, courtesy of Christos Skondras' head-turning bouzouki improvisations and Sofia Labropoulou's luminous kanun explorations. A cure for summertime blues.

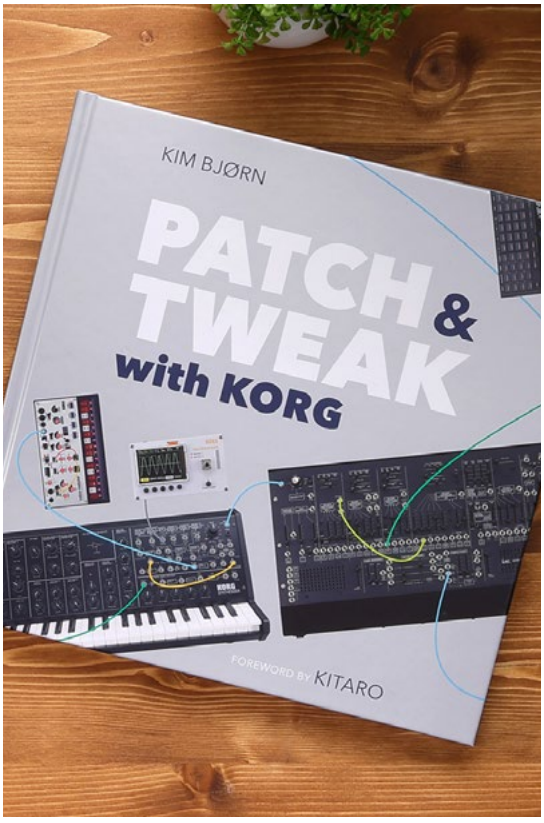
CARL GRIFFIN

'Up And Away' is out now on Sub Pop

PATCH ME THROUGH

Korg-related summer reading and rummaging

Though there have been catchier names than Korg's Nu:Tekt NTS-2, this miniature full-colour oscilloscope, spectrum analyser and tuner is a lovely tool for music makers. Pegged as a "DIY multifunctional tool", the unit (which is roughly the size of a deck of cards) also features a waveform generator that doubles up as a modulation source, or even an extra oscillator for your system. On top of all that, it's released in collaboration with Danish publisher Bjooks, who have bundled together a special hardcover Korg edition of their popular 'Patch & Tweak' series to illustrate the craft of semi-modular synthesis through the lens of Korg and ARP synths. A bargain at £165. **korg.com**



ORIGINAL THINKING

Producer touts new analogue audio format

Are you ready for another format revolution? Legendary producer T Bone Burnett sure is, having announced that he's currently developing a state-of-the-art physical music format named Ionic Original. The disc-shaped format will combine materials used in both vinyl and CDs, and supposedly consists of lacquer painted onto an aluminium disc to promise – as you might expect – superior sound quality. In fact, Burnett will raise you on that one.

"An Ionic Original is the pinnacle of recorded sound," he says. "It is archival quality. It is future proof. It is one of one. Not only is an Ionic Original the equivalent of a painting, it *is* a painting." With no news of a release date, you can keep tabs on developments through Burnett's website. **tboneburnett.com**

SOS

The British Library's Save Our Sounds project aims to save UK recordings from extinction. **Andy Linehan**, Curator of Popular Music, digs through the archive's priceless audio treasures. This month's gem:
The Myers Collection

Charles and Heather Myers were wildlife and environmental sound buffs who amassed a huge collection of recordings over their lifetime. They each developed an interest in nature from an early age and met as members of the Wildlife Sound Recording Society (WSRS), taking part in the group's field recording meetings. Heather later served as the organisation's secretary for many years. They married and settled in Shropshire, and from there, they travelled all around the British Isles with their equipment capturing the sounds of the rural environment.

The couple shared many of their findings with WSRS members and were winners of the society's annual competition on a number of occasions. The Myers also prepared audio segments for their local Talking Newspaper For The Blind.

Their collection runs to more than 550 spools of tape, containing around 6,000 individual recordings – all meticulously documented. Each reel consists of a compilation of cuts from multiple decades, which are organised by genus or subject and annotated with location, date, time and the equipment used. Additional notes give even more detail about behaviour, habitat and weather. The recordings themselves are high quality, mostly stereo and include the early adoption of binaural and ambisonic techniques.

Around 275 distinct species feature in the collection, including 220 birds, some of which are now rare, such as the golden oriole recorded in Suffolk and the capercaille in the Scottish Highlands. The Myers also taped many mechanical noises, among them vehicles, fairground organs, foghorns, and storms.

A recent BBC radio show about the WSRS featured interviews with the Myers. In it, Charles describes how their hobby, which started off simply as a means of identification, became an educational resource, a contributor to soundtracks and a therapeutic aid to many.

The recordings in the collection have now been digitised and catalogued at the British Library and will be available for public access in the near future. A one-hour mix of selections from the Myers collection, curated by British Library cataloguer and wildlife sound expert Greg Green, is available via the NTS Radio website.

For more about Save Our Sounds visit bl.uk/save-our-sounds

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DAY SPLITS REVEALED

FRIDAY 22

GROOVE ARMADA · SPIRITUALIZED
KOJEY RADICAL · KELLY LEE OWENS
BCUC · LOS BITCHOS · TIM BURGESS · JANE WEAVER · SOFIA KOURTESIS
THE GOA EXPRESS · MANARA · SAD NIGHT DYNAMITE · KATY J PEARSON
NABIHAH IQBAL & LIBBY HEANEY · SECRET NIGHT GANG · GOYA GUMBANI
NUHA RUBY RA · MANDY, INDIANA · NOSO · LYR · LOLLY ADEFOPE
A PROBLEM SQUARED · ANDREW O'NEILL · MATTHEW WINNING
GARRETT MILLERICK PLUS **THE VIP VILLAGE HOSTED BY DISTRICT**

SATURDAY 23

MOGWAI · METRONOMY · TIM PEAKE
SQUAREPUSHER · WORKING MENS CLUB · BRAINIAC LIVE
YARD ACT · PORRIDGE RADIO · LONELADY · ALEWYA · INDIA JORDAN
LANTERNS ON THE LAKE · A GUY CALLED GERALD · PLANNINGTOROCK
MR WILSON'S SECOND LINERS PRESENT LEFTISM · KORELESS · MEWN
ETHAN P FLYNN · FACESOUL · JOY ANONYMOUS · GRETEL HÄNLYN
STEWART LEE PRESENTS KING ROCKER · ADAM BUXTON: BUG · ROB ROUSE
DAVID OLUSOGA IN CONVERSATION WITH JON SAVAGE · MONICA GRADY
BIG FISH LITTLE FISH PLUS **THE VIP VILLAGE HOSTED BY HAWKSMOOR**

SUNDAY 24

BJÖRK WITH THE **HALLÉ ORCHESTRA**
ANNA MEREDITH · OUMOU SANGARÉ · WARMDUSCHER · HAAI
JIM AL-KHALILI · MARY ANNE HOBBS · HENGE · PONGO · A CERTAIN RATIO
ORLANDO WEEKS · JOCKSTRAP · LIDO PIMIENTA · KEELEY FORSYTH
STEALING SHEEP & RADIOPHONIC WORKSHOP · W.H LUNG · THE BUG CLUB
MARK RADCLIFFE'S UNE · PEANESS · FEARS · MORGAN HARPER JONES
THE ECCENTRONIC RESEARCH COUNCIL FEAT. MAXINE PEAKE
DESIREE BURCH · AHIR SHAH · KIRI PRITCHARD-MCLEAN · OLGA KOCH
ROUGH TRADE BOOKS WITH MUSA OKWONGA, ROY AND MORE
PLUS **THE VIP VILLAGE HOSTED BY WHERE THE LIGHT GETS IN**

THURSDAY OPENING CONCERT

HANNAH PEEL AND **PARAORCHESTRA: THE UNFOLDING**
KATHLEEN FRANCES PLUS VIP HOSTED BY RACHEL STOCKLEY

ACROSS THE WEEKEND

THE SPACE SHED · LUMINARIUM · TIM'S TWITTER LISTENING PARTIES
BRITISH ANTARCTIC SURVEY · CHESTER ZOO · TWILIGHT PARADES
ACTUAL REALITY ARCADE · JEDI LIGHTSABER CLASSES · STARGAZING
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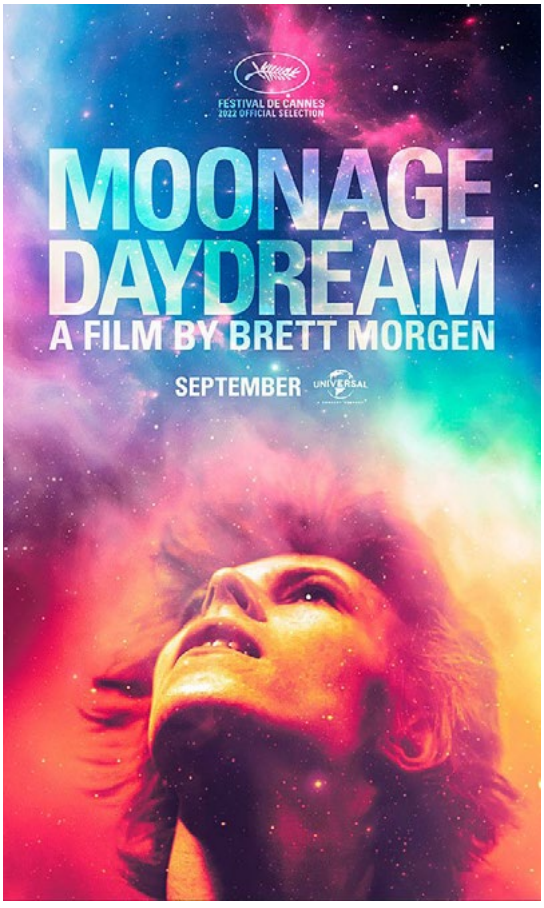
FLY ME TO THE MOONAGE

Never-before-seen footage of Bowie

Approved by the David Bowie estate, and judging by the trailer something of a psychedelic trip, the new Bowie flick 'Moonage Daydream' recently debuted at Sheffield DocFest to a stonking reception. "An immersive cinematic experience", the film features unreleased 16mm and 35mm footage from the Bowie archives, with music produced by none other than Tony Visconti. Directed by visionary filmmaker Brett Morgen, whose previous work includes the 'Kurt Cobain: Montage Of Heck' documentary, get primed and ready for the full release in September, because this is going to be one *heck* of a ride. **youtube.com**



CLOTH-EARED

Scientists invent fabric that hears

Yep, you read that right. Researchers at the Massachusetts Institute Of Technology have produced a fabric that works like a microphone, converting sounds into mechanical vibrations and then into electrical signals. The so-called "acoustic fabric" can also generate sound, and when woven into clothes is capable of detecting the wearer's heartbeat. It's made from piezoelectric material that creates an electrical current when manipulated, and as far as practical applications go, communication is the obvious one, while the tech could also help monitor heart and respiratory conditions, or be embedded into buildings to detect cracks or strains. Smart, no? **mit.edu**

UNDER THE INFLUENCE

Following the release of her 'LP.8' album, Welsh producer **Kelly Lee Owens** reveals how witchcraft, Enya and er... gravy have shaped her work

INTERVIEW: STEPHEN DALTON

NEVER MYTH A TRICK

"I feel like myths and stories that come from your home, your culture and your people are the biggest part of your identity. Also, they give a sense of community – gathering around to pass on things and finding ways of connecting people to magic. Obviously I'm interested in storytelling in a sonic sense, but of course mythology comes from the oral tradition as well as the aural. For me, it's a reminder to go into your imaginative state.

"Some of the stories are quite lighthearted but others have pretty dark and deep messages. When I was making 'Inner Song', I read 'Women Who Run With The Wolves' by Clarissa Pinkola Estés – it's full of mythologies that caution us. And we've lost that, I think. If I'd been told some of the tales she has in her book, I would have had the tools to understand the world around me better.

"People talk about the melancholic Welsh – well, I'm really glad I'm not afraid of emotion. I'm not afraid of the depths of my being."

RESPECT YOUR ELDERS

"I used to be embarrassed about where I came from. When I first moved to London, I was surrounded by rich, cool people who had giant houses and backgrounds that I knew nothing of. I almost pretended to be someone I wasn't, and I'm kind of ashamed about that now. But as the years have gone on, I'm like, 'God, my family are incredible!'. We've been through the lowest lows and highest highs, but we stick together.

"In the Western world, we are so disconnected from our elders – and I don't just mean grandparents. I've got friends in their 60s and older. One of the first things I did when I visited Australia was to go out for dinner with the artist John Olsen, who's 94 years old, and his partner, who is in her 70s. Hanging out with older people is my favourite thing to do. The value you get from them, the life experience, the wisdom… it all comes back to stories."

PHOTO: KIM HIORTHØY

IT'S ALL GRAVY

"Yes, I literally mean gravy. My partner's mother came down for Mother's Day, when I was in Australia, and I cooked a roast dinner – two types of mashed potato, my own Yorkshire puddings – but the thing I was most worried about was the gravy. If you get the gravy wrong, it's game over, I'd be cast out of the family.

"My mum is going to hate me for saying this, but she's not a very good cook. I've still got fond memories of Christmas dinner, which my nan would make, and my mum would do the gravy. It brought the meal and the family together, and I was always so proud of her because she did such a great job.

"So my partner's mum helped me make the gravy. It reminded me of home and of my mother. For me, gravy just means family and memories."

LEAF IT OUT

"I've found plants are a deep reflection of where I am in life. I used to kill a lot of plants – not by choice! I didn't know… do they need water? Do they need sunlight? This was in my early 20s, which was also when I didn't know how to take care of myself. I didn't have the time, I didn't have structure.

"Now, I sometimes water my plants before I water myself in the morning. One of the most cathartic things for me is to be around them. I'm starting to bring them in to studios, and I can't really work without them. Plants are our friends, and the journey of taking care of something is a worthy one."

EVERY WITCH WAY

"When I was younger, I used to define myself as a white witch because it meant wisdom. My great-grandmother, Gwen Owens, was born in the late 1800s and was known as a witch. She met with other women and would be involved in witchcraft or wyse-craft… whatever you like to call it. She'd read tea leaves for people and was extremely psychic. It was well known in the community that if you wanted some understanding of your potential future you would go to Gwen. I've found these things coming through me too.

"I dream things that come true quite often, and I have images coming into my head that then happen. I read tarot, but only for friends. I just see tarot cards as a tool, like in music – the synth is the tool but you're putting all your love and creativity into that."

ANCIENT SOUNDS

"In some cultures, music has been used in tandem with plant medicine. The voice, or music, is the guide through the depths of the journey you are taking. I don't know much about plant medicine in Wales, but other cultures have been doing this for thousands of years. When I listened back to 'LP.8' recently, I thought the opening track 'Release', sounded like a Native American drum! It wasn't what I was going for, but that's like the earliest form of techno. That heartbeat, that repetition – it's always been there."

GO WITH THE ORINOCO FLOW

"Enya could sing in English or Gaelic. She was going to bring you into her world whether you liked it or not. We both come from places where our culture and language have been oppressed, and I saw this woman singing in Gaelic. I love the whole mysterious energy around her – she lives in a castle on the outskirts of Dublin, no one ever sees her, she never tours. She doesn't have to.

"Enya makes albums that are played in every spa in the world, but she's also revered by music nerds. She sounds like the future and yet there's this ancient thread to the past. All those things inspired me, and the fact that she's a woman. It may be boring to talk about the woman thing in music, but I think it's still necessary. She's got a fish named after her! I'd bloody love that."

'LP.8' is out now on Smalltown Supersound

IN A SPIN

Ukrainian art for your decks

You need these Audio-Technica slipmats in your set-up. Designed by Kyiv-based artist Eugene, who describes himself as a "calligraphy teacher gone rogue", they form part of his mission to raise awareness of Ukrainian culture. The illustration marries medieval art and contemporary abstract design with the country's national colours, and you can get one for just £12. Audio-Technica are donating 100 per cent of each sale to two Ukrainian charities selected by the artist. You know what to do. **audio-technica.com**

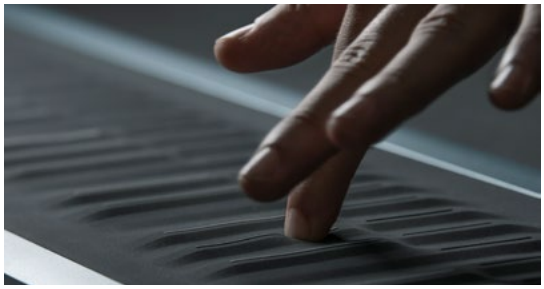
TOUCH AND GO

MPE controller gets a next-gen reboot

After a two-year hiatus, the ROLI Seaboard is back in all its tactile glory, reimagined and re-engineered. Designed for "limitless exploration of sound", the Seaboard RISE 2 maintains the fundamentals of its predecessor, but its soft, responsive silicone playing surface brings improvements with intuitive touch and "precision frets", enhanced connectivity with the addition of USB-C, and the potential to emulate traditional instruments with "astonishing realism".

"Developing new instruments is a long process," says company CEO, Roland Lamb. "RISE 2 is easier to play, more durable and a more expressive experience than ever before."

It also ships with a copy of ROLI's powerful, MPE-optimised Equator2 soft synth, which can generate a multitude of sounds. Pre-order a bundle now for £1,099 and you should expect to receive it in time for Christmas. **roli.com**



HIGHWAY CODE

David Lynch cult classic earns vinyl reissue

In celebration of its 25th anniversary, the soundtrack to David Lynch's 1997 neo-noir psychological thriller 'Lost Highway' has received a deluxe double LP re-release, courtesy of Waxwork Records. Presented on 150 gram splatter vinyl, with a gatefold sleeve and a heavyweight art print, the soundtrack includes not only the original score by Angelo Badalamenti and Barry Adamson, but also tracks by the likes of Bowie, Lou Reed, Nine Inch Nails and Smashing Pumpkins. The perfect way to celebrate Lynch's surreal "psychogenic fugue", it's all yours for $42. **waxworkrecords.com**

Ost ♥ Kjex

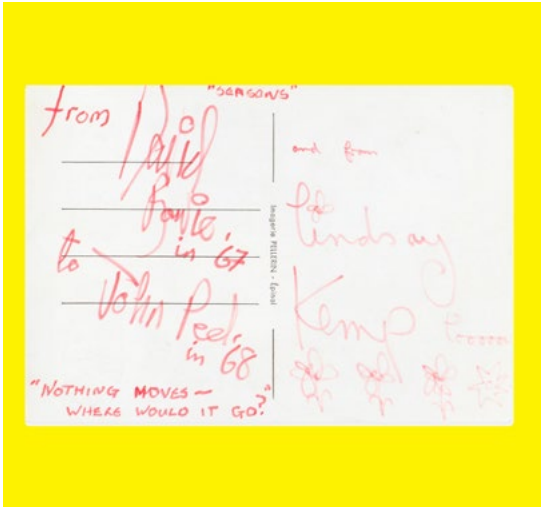
Songs from the end of the world
NEW ALBUM OUT NOW
Snick Snack Music

Also available on Snick Snack Music: Wild Flowers / Reactivate

EASY PEELERS

John Peel's prized items go to auction

Last month, in celebration of Glastonbury Festival's 50th anniversary, members of John Peel's family auctioned off a collection of items from the famed DJ's archive – and a few of those are well worth sharing with you. Included was an autographed copy of John Lennon and Yoko Ono's 'Unfinished Music No 1: Two Virgins' album (which sold for £15,300), and a test pressing of the Sex Pistols' 'Anarchy In The UK' single (which went for over £20,000). But most intriguing were those items that revealed something about Peel's personal relationships with these iconic figures, like postcards from Lennon and Bowie, and a set of Marc Bolan's lyrics, handwritten by the artist on an opened-out envelope in red felt-tip pen. Check out the full auction online at **bonhams.com**



PIRATE INVESTIGATIONS

The NY radio project archiving the airwaves

Tracing Neighbourhoods In The Sky is an ongoing project investigating Brooklyn's thriving pirate radio culture. Established in 2014 by award-winning radio producer David Goren, it now encompasses a visual gallery, telling the history of some essential stations, and an interactive online catalogue called the Pirate Radio Sound Map, which invites users to search through the a wealth of different stations and recordings.

"Having lived and worked in Brooklyn for 30-plus years," says Goren, "I've listened with fascination as the small and furtive local pirate radio scene morphed into a sprawling grassroots community radio movement in the 1990s, aimed largely towards immigrant enclaves who were often excluded from accessing the legal airwaves by economic and political factors. I began recording them in 2014 as well as seeking out station operators and their listeners for interviews. And in 2018, I released the Pirate Radio Sound Map, a format intended to replicate the feel of tuning through the various stations."

You can hear a collection of recordings from the project on Goren's 'Brooklyn Pirates: Neighbourhoods In The Sky, 2014-2021' album, released on London label Death Is Not The End. **pirateradiomap.com / deathisnot.bandcamp.com**

TIME MACHINE

It's been a busy year so far for Finnish techno/jazz polymath **Jimi Tenor**, releasing a photo biography, 'Omniverse', and an album, 'Multiversum'. Hold on tight for a wild ride through his eclectic existence

WORDS: JEREMY ALLEN

If Jimi Tenor grew up a seemingly unusual child with curious interests, then it turned out he was just ahead of his time because, when the 1990s arrived, everything fell into place.

"I think I was lucky," says the dandy Finnish musician. "For a while, everything sucked big time. In the 1980s, I played the flute, and you couldn't say that you played flute because people would laugh at you. It was horrible, but then it changed."

Born Lassi Lehto (he later changed his name to Jimi Tenor after the tenor sax, his favourite instrument), he was a creative and sensitive boy. even carving his own instruments out of wood he found. Though impressive, his skills were lost on his peers, who wondered if he was a bit of a hippy.

"And then came the 90s, and there were hip hop samples and the exotica revival began," he says. "All of a sudden, the flute was great!"

The availability of more accessible equipment at affordable prices also helped kick-start his career as a musician.

"Mackie mixers came onto the market, and suddenly you could record stuff at home," he says. "Before that, if you went to a studio and said, 'I have synths and a drum machine', they'd say, 'That's a problem'. So for me, it all worked out perfectly."

Tenor's recent photo biography, 'Omniverse', casts some light on a decade filled with adventure that went by in a blur. After moving to New York to be a photographer, he lived in Espoo, Finland in a Communist Party dance hall that was up a hill and you had to row to get to. Having been signed to Warp, he lived in Steve Beckett's house in Sheffield while he recorded 1997's 'Intervision'. Then he took off for Barcelona for a while, and it was in the Catalonian capital where he memorably entered his own show on horseback, dressed in a giant regal cape.

"That was made for Sónar Festival in 1998," he says. "I rode onstage like a king from the olden days, with the whole back of the horse covered by this

PHOTO: ANTTI VIITALA

humongous cape. The guy who made it worked at the Opéra Garnier in Paris. He knew how to make it nice so it stayed on the shoulders. We got all the blue sequined fabric from the garment district in the 2nd arrondissement and it was just a great, great thing."

Another spectacular entrance had occurred at Barrowlands in Glasgow on New Year's Eve, 1995. Tenor was dressed from head to toe in extravagant banana yellow, including huge lemon shades, which were purely for show and didn't have his lenses fitted.

"I was there to play a solo gig downstairs," he recalls. "Then they asked me to come upstairs into the big hall and do 'Take Me Baby' because people love that track. I couldn't see anything with these shades on, and on top of that I was a bit intoxicated."

Tenor walked out onstage, microphone in hand, to rapturous applause – and just kept on going.

"I fell straight into the photo pit of the stage – it was terrible," he laments.

Ever the professional, he dusted himself down and returned to the stage to perform the song, with many of the revellers that night assuming the pratfall was part of the act.

Threads are clearly important to Tenor. If clothes make the man, the man himself set out to make a little bit of money on the side by bringing out his own fashion line. Tenorwear ("everyday clothes with little unique details") was a label for anyone interested in wild attire. It was never going to compete with Rocawear or Wu Wear, and there were concerns fans might confuse it with TENA-wear (undergarments for incontinence), but hey, he wasn't going to let the doubters spoil a half-baked plan.

"In the mid-90s, I thought I could do anything," says Tenor, laughing. "I had this idea for one pair of pants – flares, which you could adjust according to the whims of fashion. I made them out of this durable, glossy, outdoor material so that they would last for decades, and they had special zippers too. I was out dancing in a club in London and a lot of people were asking, 'Where can I get these pants?'. So I thought, 'Maybe I can start making them, and actually produce my own fashion line'."

As well as the trousers, he made shirts with a Velcro Tenorwear label, which you could move to wherever you wanted, and a dress that came with a three-inch golden CD, featuring "exclusive electronic music".

The CDs weren't made of real gold, though perhaps they might be worth something now. Has he tried putting any of them on eBay?

"I've still got about 50 of them," he admits. "Maybe I'll give it a go in another 20 years…"

Tenor saw his side hustle as a way to maximise his pleasure, but business had other plans.

"My whole idea was that I would be the face of the fashion line," he smiles. "Not that I'd actually have to do any of the work. Just like, you know, the cocktail parties, the glamorous life and so forth. But it turned out to be a difficult job."

There are pictures in the book of Tenor stitching his own wares at the factory in post-Soviet-era Estonia, where Tenorwear was manufactured. Again way ahead of his time, he aspired to be a social media influencer before that was even a thing.

"The kind of stuff Paris Hilton or the Kardashians are doing," he says. "Where you don't actually do shit."

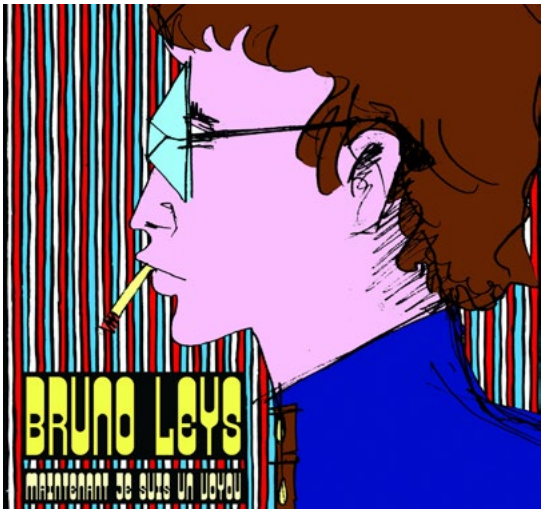
Tenor takes away some interesting experiences from the failed venture, and he's still got something to show for it, which he intends to pass on.

"I'm gonna give what I have left to my girls," he says, with an air of pride. "My daughters are exactly the right size now that the stuff will fit them."

'Omniverse' is published by Ventil Verlag, and 'Multiversum' is on Bureau B – both are out now

ENIGMAS

Sweeping the forgotten corridors of sound, **Scott Blixen** sets his sights on **Bruno Leys**



I suppose it boils down to how mad you want pop music to be. If you want it chaotic, feral, exploratory and downright rude, then you've struck gold with Bruno Leys.

Leys and a clique of cosmic cohorts recorded a quartet of songs in 1969 that tested how far French pop was prepared to go in its psychedelic heyday. That they were only being pressed onto wax over 50 years later is both criminal and sublime.

Although billed under Ley's name alone, these precious recordings are a testament to a celestial partnership. Leys met Emmanuel Pairault when they were students in 1967, just as the latter switched to a music degree and gained access to an ondes Martenot. The coupling of Pairault's proto-synth compositions and Ley's wild lyrical stylings was an explosive mixture that attracted Parisian label La Compagnie, then home to artists including France Gall.

If the backing band on these recordings sound like they're in a distant shed, it matters little, for they're eclipsed by the ondes Martenot's unearthly oscillations. On the gorgeous 'Eve', an extraterrestrial orchestra is seemingly conjured out of electrostatic and enthusiasm. 'Dans La Galaxie' is subjected to stomach-churning phase, and is Echoplexed to the outer limits of good taste and reason (needless to say, I mean this as the highest possible praise). 'Hallucination' represents the seamless integration of electronics into pop, in terms of both melody and texture, and on 'Maintenant Je Suis Un Voyou', Leys unleashes his inner thug, closing with the line, "Salut salope / Tu me regrettes pas". I only have schoolboy French but I know that's not polite. In 1969, I doubt it would have endeared him to emergent feminists.

Shortly after recording the four songs, Leys was called up for military service, which led to a loss of momentum and, eventually, the tapes. French pop operated on a brutal sink-or-swim basis in the 1960s, and it's chilling that these incendiary excursions all but vanished into a black hole. Two tracks were issued on a promo seven-inch in Canada, but somehow failed to ignite interest, while the other two survived only on acetate. A tantalising tale for seekers of lost treasure.

I had long dreamed of a Bruno Leys seven-inch EP (it's surely what the Gallic gods intended and would comfortably encompass his whole music career), and in 2020, Born Bad Records duly obliged. Prepare to have your synapses blown.

SIGN LANGUAGE

More covetable art prints from Liverpool's Dorothy

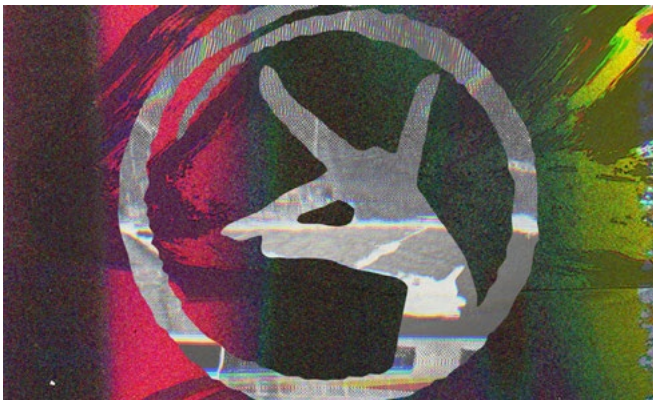
Road To Nowhere: Road Trip is the latest collection from Dorothy, the Liverpool-based design studio behind gorgeous art prints covering music, film and TV, literature and more (our go-to is the pioneering electronic albums reimagined as stamps – genius). Using the iconic road sign template designed by Jock Kinneir and Margaret Calvert in the late 1950s, their latest set features screen prints that point you towards club nights that were the "spiritual homes" of acid house and rave culture in the late 1980s and early 1990s. So for London, think Shoom, The Trip and Future, while The North directs you to iconic venues such as The Haçienda, Blackpool's Shaboo and Liverpool's Quadrant Park. Prices start from £35. **wearedorothy.com**

CRAMMING

Cult label launches digital reissue campaign

To mark their 42nd anniversary, Belgium's Crammed Discs label are digitally reissuing 250 rare tracks from their extensive back catalogue, focusing on the pioneering electronic music released on their SSR, Language and Selector imprints during the 1980s and 1990s.

Releases from the Crammed archives will be drip-fed over the next 18 months, kicking off with the 'Rare Early SSR Electronica EP' – five tracks of early house music, proto bleep techno and more. Available to buy for €7, the EP features Mr Big Mouse (aka Crammed boss Marc Hollander) and Bleep, an early pseudonym of Geir "Biosphere" Jenssen. A 24-track digital compilation, 'Rare SSR Electronica 1988-1994', is also out now. **crammed.be**



rolling like a bullet
the new LP by andrew ostler

"a work of great subtlety and focus -
alternating sections of drone and gentle synth pulses,
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Vintage electronic/electro from early 80s
Deluxe packaging (125 box sets), 32-pp booklet, poster
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Once described as "**DEPECHE MODE** meets **KILLING JOKE** with a dash of **THROBBING GRISTLE** and **MAURICE RAVEL**"

PULSE

GHOST POWER

Sci-fi funk instrumentals from power duo

WHO THEY?

Lashed together from the sympatico psyches of Tim Gane (Stereolab, Cavern Of Anti-Matter) and Jeremy Novak (Dymaxion), Ghost Power is an instrumental project that lit up during the days of the pandemic. Gane and Novak convened in both Berlin and New York, or would work remotely when circumstances dictated. When the pair released 2020's numbered and hand-stamped seven-inch single, 'Asteroid Witch' / 'Inchwork', it sold out overnight.

WHY GHOST POWER?

Building from their debut single (both sides of which are included on their recent self-titled first long-player), Ghost Power slot into that part of the musical spectrum where their largely instrumental offerings tilt fetchingly towards soundtrack music. A handful of the tracks clock in fairly close to the two-minute mark, which makes them feel like tantalisingly crafted cues for a modern sci-fi, featuring a tremendous amount of retro furniture. Very analogue-sounding synths and acoustic drums bring a Stereolab vibe to proceedings, but that's taking the lazy listener's route. The themes they've forged are all brilliantly arranged and they never let their Moon Boots slip from the throttle.

TELL US MORE...

So far, Gane and Novak have kept mum about future Ghost Power music, although it's unlikely that any live gigs would be put together to perform material featuring dozens of unique sounds from a number of vintage palettes. But considering the end-to-end enjoyment of this first album and the positive reception it has generated, it's a fair bet that more shuttles will be departing their launchpad.

JOE SILVA

'Ghost Power' is out now on Duophonic Super 45s

A GALAXY FAR, FAR AWAY

Find out how the sounds of 'Star Wars' are created

Ever wondered how the distinctive hum of a lightsaber is made? What about the buzzsaw-like whir of a TIE fighter? 'Behind The Mac: Skywalker Sound' is a fascinating documentary that goes behind the scenes at Lucasfilm's sound division, exploring how such effects are brought to life for the 'Star Wars' universe. The film explains how sound engineers manipulate, edit and mix their recordings. Along the way, you learn how George Lucas pioneered the concept of "the used future", which sought to replace synthetic sound effects in sci-fi films. With over 720,000 sounds in the Skywalker SFX library, the Force is most definitely strong with this one. Watch the doc for free on Apple's YouTube channel. **youtube.com/Apple**

BARE NECESSITIES

Naked Record Club offers eco-friendly vinyl

For anyone weighing up the carbon footprint of their record collection, Naked Record Club can now offer an alternative. Simon Parker, a former musician and gig promoter, has joined forces with Deepgrooves, a vinyl pressing plant in the Netherlands, to launch the world's first eco-friendly record club. As well as releasing records that are as green as possible (Deepgrooves uses a vinyl granulate based on environmentally friendly calcium zinc and FSC- certified paper and cardboard), Parker is championing albums by indie artists that are either out of press or have never been available on vinyl before. You can sign up for a three-month (£99), six-month (£186) or 12-month (£336) membership, and early offerings include albums by Babybird, Lowgold and The Chesterfields. **vinyl-revolution.com**

COOKING ON GASOLIO

Label launches dubplate campaign

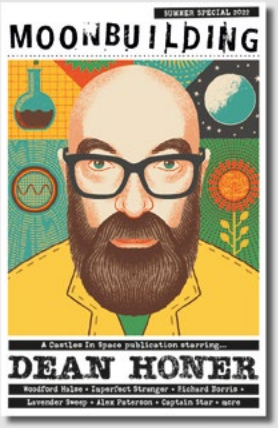
Headed up by Italian producer, DJ and sound designer Francesco Devincenti, Gasolio Dubplate Series is a new Berlin-based label focusing on super-limited releases of "dub-centred electronic music" – including drum 'n' bass, downtempo, reggae and more. With vinyl pressing plant delays ongoing, Gasolio is taking the whole process in-house, with Devincenti mixing, mastering and even cutting the dubplates himself. The first release is his own 'Echo Fuel', an excellent two-track 12-inch that veers between jungle, dubstep and ambient. Interested? You can order one now for €12. **gdsdub.bandcamp.com**

SPACE AGE

Frequency Domain launch offshoot imprint

Space Surgeries is another new project from the folks at Frequency Domain, a label which has been filling our ears with top-drawer electronics since 2015. It's not their first go at moonlighting, either, with the Intercepts sub-label starting last year. So what's the deal with this one?

"Sonically," says label boss Ali Wade, "the output of both Space Surgeries and Intercepts fits well within Frequency Domain's wide-ranging scope – see volumes one and two of our 'Partials' compilations. But we felt developing two new sub-labels, with clear identities behind them, would allow us additional freedom to push and experiment in these areas, as well as opportunities to invite new artists into the FD family." A pair of new releases came out in May, one from Wade, another from Quiet Clapping, and both are available digitally through the Space Surgeries Bandcamp site. **spacesurgeries.bandcamp.com**



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PULSE

ANATOLIAN WEAPONS

Electronic wizardry from Greek scenester

WHO THEY?

In-demand Athenian producer and DJ Aggelos Baltas operates under various guises, including the house/techno-hued Dream Weapons and the interstellar/krautrocky Fantastikoi Hxoi. As Anatolian Weapons, he's a crossover of the two, dabbling in trance, dub, ambient and echoes of traditional Greek music as he goes. "I strongly believe that only good things can come from cross-pollination," he says. "I try to keep an open mind and see what happens. It's more fun that way." With a host of well-received AW singles and EPs already under his belt, Baltas' latest record, 'Selected Acid Tracks', should garner him even more attention.

WHY ANATOLIAN WEAPONS?

The follow-up to 2019's 'To The Mother Of Gods', 'Selected Acid Tracks' does pretty much what it says on the tin. Loosely inspired by Andrew Weatherall and released on Cheltenham's fast-rising electronic/experimental label, Byrd Out, the album's heady, acid-hued cuts are crafted for the dancefloor. Thumper 'Acid Research 20' fuses crashing early 80s pads with squelchy synth work (think Baby Ford) and peak Haçienda vibes. Immersive remixes by Serbian producer/DJ AASKA and Coma World (Betamax of The Comet Is Coming and Pete Bennie of Speakers Corner Quartet) temper Baltas' essential beats with woozy, downtempo vibes. The Guv'nor would approve.

TELL US MORE...

His recent Anatolian Weapons remix project is well worth checking out. Released on Lurid Music, 'May That War Be Cursed' (four volumes) features cracking rerubs of AW tracks by Philipp Otterbach, Tassilo Vanhöfen, A Strange Wedding, Black Seed and others, with all funds going towards humanitarian aid in Ukraine. "I've done over 20 remixes in the past year," says Baltas, "plus quite a few compilation commissions, which kept me busy and happy." With further collabs on the way, there's plenty still to come from this prolific artist. More power to his elbow.

VELIMIR ILIC

'Selected Acid Tracks' is out now on Byrd Out

SCREEN TIME

A mobile projector for your wishlist

Projector tech is fairly astonishing these days, and for home cinema on the go, this Samsung Freestyle HDR Smart Portable LED Projector does exactly what its name suggests. You can choose your projection size (with an image that goes up to 100 inches) and beam it onto any colour wall. It's even got 360-degree sound with enhanced bass, so there's no chance of anyone missing out. Unsurprisingly, this nifty little contraption will set you back a whopping £999. But rest assured, you'll be getting your money's worth, and then some. **samsung.com**

DIG FOR VICTORY

Annual indie label record fair returns

Calling all crate diggers! Head down to Coal Drops Yard in King's Cross, London on 16 July as the Independent Label Market returns for another year. A host of the UK's finest indie labels, including Ninja Tune, Rough Trade, 4AD, Heavenly, Bella Union, Erased Tapes, Sonic Cathedral, Clay Pipe and many others will be hawking their wares, promising rarities, exclusive merchandise and new releases. The event will be soundtracked by several DJs, and there's even an after-party at the Royal Festival Hall. Free entry, shedloads of vinyl, great music, locally brewed beers. What's not to love? **independentlabelmarket.com**

LANDMARKS

The Beatmasters' Paul Carter recalls the making of **'Rok Da House'**, their 1987 hit with **The Cookie Crew** – widely acknowledged as the first hip house record

INTERVIEW: IAN BERRIMAN

"I was working in a company that made music for TV commercials. They'd just bought an E-MU Emulator II, which was a big deal – I remember they paid £10,000 for, I think, 18 seconds of 8-bit sampling. They also had an SP-12 drum machine. Although they'd forked out this huge amount of money on equipment, it was just gathering dust.

"The company was right in the middle of Soho. My friend Manda Glanfield worked there as well. She and I used to go to nightclubs that played a lot of black music. There was Crackers, just off Wardour Street, the Wag Club and Le Beat Route. We started to hear the very earliest house music records there. One particular night in early 1986, we were in a club and they played a really minimalist house track, 'Time To Jack', by Chip E. It was the most bog-standard, simple, yet completely compelling thing we had ever heard. We both loved it.

"The next day was a Saturday, and we said, 'Let's dig out all that gear that's gathering dust'. Richard Walmsley was one of the people that used to play on the jingles. So the three of us made this record. We went into the studio, hooked it all up and made our first attempt at house music, in one day.

"We broke all the rules and used all the wrong sounds. We didn't know about 909s, 707s and all these antique drum machines everyone was using in the Chicago house scene. We used what we had to hand, which were the drums already loaded onto the drum machine, the piano already in the Emulator II, and a few other bits and pieces. It just sat on the shelf for six months. We didn't really know what to do with it.

"Then The Cookie Crew, who were rappers from South London, came in to do a rap on a Ribena advert, of all things, and I thought, 'They're great!'.

I hadn't heard of them at that point, but I gave them a ring and said, 'We've got this instrumental, and we're not sure where to take it. Would you try something out?'.

"They came down probably around July 1986. We played it to them, and they said, 'Could you leave us alone for a bit?'. I said, 'Alright, I'll go to the shops and get something to eat – what do you want?'. One of them said, 'Get as many sweets as you can for a pound'. That's all they wanted to eat! By the time I got back, they'd more or less written it.

"The recording was shocking because we never thought we'd use what they did the first time. We stuck one microphone up, a C414 – completely inappropriate for vocals – played the track and they did it. They did one or two bits again, and a couple of hours later it was finished.

"We ran out of sampling time on the E-MU, so where we wanted the vocals to stutter, we had to sample them into a delay line, then press it manually to trigger the vocal. It was very simply made, though very hi-tech in terms of the gear we were using. We were fortunate to have access to this stuff. We weren't using the equipment to its full potential as we weren't that familiar with it, so it was still made in the spirit of a homemade record.

"Mark Moore from S'Express got us our record deal. Everybody else had turned the track down. Whoever their favourite artist was, they'd say, 'Can you make it more like them?'. Being young and feisty, we said, 'Fuck off!'. We went to a place in Dalston that specialised in cutting dub records and got half a dozen acetates. We didn't give an acetate to Mark, but he somehow got hold of one and took it to Rhythm King. He said, 'You've got to sign this'.

"It was first released in the summer of 1987, by which time house was blowing up. The scene had changed by then, and perhaps our mix wasn't as upfront as it needed to be, so they remixed it. They reissued it in 1988, and it was a massive hit. That was a big surprise to us all.

"The Cookie Crew were absolutely appalled. To this day, they say they were deceived into making it, which is absolute rubbish. OK, I gave them a bag of sweets, but I didn't lure them into doing something they didn't want to do. They said, 'We didn't know it was a house record'. Well, the clue's in the title. And I didn't give them the title. They came up with that themselves.

"It was a pity because the track might have done even better if The Cookie Crew had been prepared to promote it. 'Top Of The Pops' wanted us, but they wouldn't do it. It took the edge off what should have been an amazing time.

"We accidentally made the first hip house record. It wasn't deliberate. Around 1987 or 1988, house tunes started to appear from America with rappers on them, notably Tyree Cooper and Fast Eddie from Chicago. I think one of them coined the term hip house. We said, 'Bloody hell, we did this years before you!'. So we namechecked them in 'Who's In The House?' in 1989 – "Watch out Tyree, we cut faster / Get ready, who's Fast Eddie?". We set the record straight.

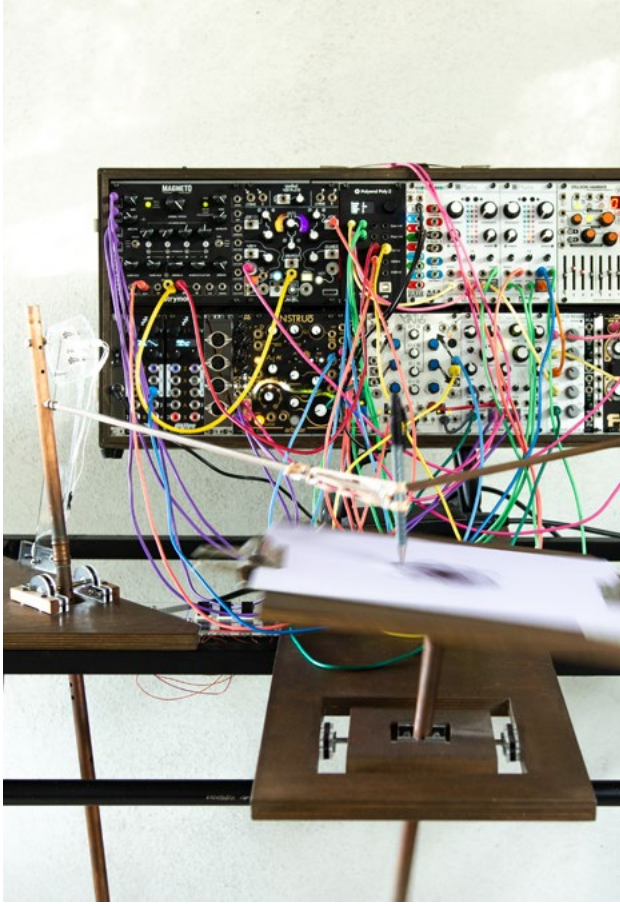
"I still feel very proud of it. If you go on YouTube, you'll find hundreds of comments saying, 'I remember driving around in my XR3 listening to this, banging it out of the window', and you think, 'Good God, isn't that weird? Something you did really affected people's lives'. And it opened so many doors – I never had to do a proper job again. I mean, music's hard work, but it's not like digging a ditch!"

A new track by The Beatmasters, 'Good Old Daze', is out now on Happy? Recordings

MACHINE MUSIC

From indie folk to experimental electronics, **Lomond Campbell** has been on quite the journey. We check in with him at his home studio in the Scottish Highlands, to hear about his latest invention, which transforms letters into sounds

WORDS: WILLIAM STOKES



"It's interesting to create something that *might* be quite exciting and magical. Something between what you want it to be and what something else wants it to be."

Scottish musician and inventor Lomond Campbell is speaking from his home studio – a stunning, converted primary school within eye-shot of Ben Nevis. Renamed The Lengths, the studio has become Campbell's headquarters for recording music and building his imaginative synths – though the two activities go very much hand in hand.

Campbell is showing off his latest invention, the Unsung Machine, a beautiful brass and walnut-finished device that invites users to input words via eight letter wheels, each of which in turn sends out letter-specific, MIDI control messages, or CCs, to a synthesiser.

"I was looking for a meaningful way to incorporate language into music that bypassed the convention of hearing the words being said or sung," he says. "The Unsung Machine is an experimental interface that introduces aleatoric events into music through the act of entering words."

Telecommunications devices of yore inspired the Unsung Machine, both in terms of concept and aesthetic.

"Years ago, I was working with National Museums Scotland, doing a bunch of projects for them," explains Campbell. "I got to see all these telecommunications devices that were just amazing. They looked like mutants, compared to what we know now. Everybody takes a QWERTY keyboard for granted, but imagine if it wasn't there? What do you get? It was fascinating to slow down the process of typing."

Campbell's discovery of Eurorack modular synthesis and its currency of control voltage, or CV, is what paved the way for him to develop his craft as an instrument builder.

"I've always been tinkering," he admits. "And then I got curious about Eurorack around 2013. Instantly I was like, 'Right, OK, this is really great', because all this machine knows is voltage – that's all it's interested in. And that's amazing, because I can just send voltage and talk to it in a really basic language."

Campbell's first custom machine was the Harmonograph, a pendulum-driven "archaic drawing machine", that produces Spirograph-style patterns while sending CV triggers to Campbell's modular system. Two experimental ambient albums followed using the machine – 'Near Unison' and 'Near Unison Volume II', both released in 2020.

Then came LUP, an instrument originally built on commission from Campbell's friend and collaborator Kenny Anderson, otherwise known as Fife's King Creosote.

"He was getting into Basinski, the strident experimentalists of the 60s, things like that," says Campbell. "So he asked me to build him some kind of machine that referenced this.

"Again, LUP was simple. It was just a kind of modified tape machine that would play a 10-second loop, and the mechanism for making everything turn fired off multiple gates. It was the same technology that I had figured out for the Harmonograph, it just had a slightly different mechanism."

Campbell's LUP experiments have given way to a trio of plaintive electronic albums. The final instalment, 'Under This Hunger Moon We Fell', is slated for release on One Little Independent in October. Campbell insists that simplicity is at the heart of his practice – at least, as far as the music goes. Visual beauty, tactility and mesmeric kinetics are just as important to his creations as the sounds their movements facilitate.

"It's not like I'm amazing at electronics, or coding, or anything like that," he says rather earnestly. "But I can do enough to talk to a machine in a really simple way. Most of my work is just sending very simple things, like a couple of gates. That's all you really need to make an interesting project. You can send simple signals into the box and figure the rest out in the modular world. Because of the nature of modular, the complexity can be in the patching.

"I end up spending too much money on stuff, because I'm so drawn in to how it functions, how you interact with it." Campbell continues. "So there's a bit of music device fetishism! Like, I want the buttons to have a certain kind of sound. I love building things. If you're going to build something, you can make it exactly how you want a device to be."

For more on the Unsung Machine, visit lomondcampbell.com.
'Under This Hunger Moon We Fell' will be released later in the year

PULSE

EL HARDWICK

Artist puts multi into multi-talented

WHO THEY?

Photographer, curator, writer, director *and* musician, London-based El Hardwick is truly a multidisciplinary artist. They identify as trans non-binary, which informs their exploration through music of "relationships between bodies and their surrounding environments, queer world-making practices, and how we can heal a damaged planet".

WHY EL HARDWICK?

Their newest single, 'Body Memory', a collaboration with fab experimental cellist Mabe Fratti, is a delicate meditation on a break-up situation. Electronics glisten, strings swell and Hardwick's voice enchants like they're channelling Björk. Also check out their 2020 debut, '8', the first release under their own name (they were formerly known as Moonbow). A brilliantly experimental concept record about climate action and digital justice, the album mixes Hardwick's soaring vocals with skittering electronic blurs and bleeps, and even comes with a 40-page book of poetry and photos. Very snazzy.

TELL US MORE...

Their photography has seen them exhibit in galleries across the globe including Paris, Tokyo, Los Angeles and Lisbon, as well as back home in London. They've done talks on their work at both Cambridge and Oxford Universities, curated several events and zines and, in September 2020, launched Desire Lines. In their own words, it's "a series of occasional multidisciplinary projects that centre community healing at the intersection of music, art and ecology". The ever-evolving talents of El Hardwick are not to be ignored. And if 'Body Memory' is anything to go by, we're excited to see what they conjure up next.

FINLAY MILLIGAN

'Body Memory' is out now on Desire Lines

TURN ON, TUBE IN

OMA amp is a feast for the eyes and ears

Let's save the price for last with this new Oswalds Mill Audio tube amp. Dubbed the Special K, it's modelled after 1930s cinema speaker electronics, which often made use of handmade vertical racks. An integrated system (like all OMA amps), it comes with eight KT88 tubes that look absolutely delightful, and produces nearly 50 watts per channel into 8 ohms, meaning it's beautiful and a beast, weighing in at just over 100kg. Now, for the price. Well… we don't actually know it. The Pennsylvanian company hasn't made that bit public, though don't be surprised if it's over $50,000. Go to their website to salivate over more images.
oswaldsmillaudio.com

IN TRANSIT

Nifty tech tracks live trains

Now this is a bit of brilliant ingenuity. Born from the Cambridge Hackspace (a non-profit group of DIY tinkerers based in Massachusetts), Traintrackr is a collection of LED rail transit maps, pulling live train data to tell you exactly what's arriving, and when. Each model receives the data via Wi-Fi, and displays the information through a host of flashing lights. There's a great-looking London Underground version, which looks like something you might find in a retro-futuristic version of the capital, with all the main lines (no updated version with the Elizabeth line as yet). Some versions of individual lines are available, but the most eye-catching one actually tracks UK weather conditions. Raining in Scotland, you say? Prices start at £99. **traintrackr.co.uk**

ALL NIGHT LONG

Go to sleep with James Blake

AI mindfulness and wellness company Endel have teamed up with producer James Blake to create 'Wind Down', a 15-track ambient album created with the explicit intention of supporting healthy sleep. Representing the first AI-based album to be released by a Universal Music Group label, the body of work joins Endel's growing list of collaborative works, including Plastikman's 'Deeper Focus' and – we should have guessed – Grimes' 'AI Lullaby'.

"It's mesmerising to hear how my music blends with the science-based sounds of Endel's AI," says Blake. "I think we've invented something not just beautiful or even meaningful, but truly practical." You can stream 'Wind Down' on all major DSPs now. **endel.io**

THAT'S DEEP, MAN

Iconic composer's ideas published in book form

The music of American composer Pauline Oliveros, a legend of 1970s electronic experimentalism, was a response to the anti-war movements of the 1960s. Through her compositions, Oliveros experimented with meditation, movement and activism, in the process creating the concept she called Deep Listening – "a practice for healing and transformation open to all" – which became fundamental to her music. Oliveros died in 2016, but her theories have experienced a resurgence in recent years, and have now been turned into a book, titled 'Quantum Listening'. Described as a "manifesto for listening as activism through simple yet profound exercises", this timely edition from Ignota Books brings Oliveros' futuristic vision together with a new foreword by fellow electronic music pioneer, Laurie Anderson. Order a copy now for just £6.99. **ignota.org**

HEAR ME OUT

Bay Area immersive listening experience

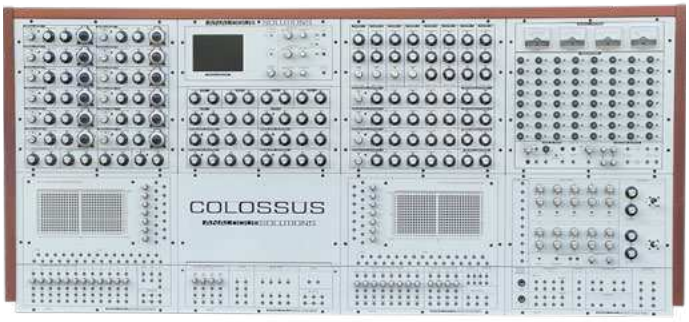
Based in The Midway in San Francisco, Envelop SF is a bespoke 32-speaker immersive audio venue created by Envelop. With interactive LED lights embedded in eight speaker columns, it's designed to create what they call "synchronised audiovisual overlap", and looks like a glitzy next-generation of audiophile listening cafes. They've also got pretty good taste, by the looks of it. Recent performances have featured Suzanne Ciani, who performed selected works from her back catalogue, as well as listening parties for The Flaming Lips' 'Yoshimi Battles The Pink Robots', and various hits from Daft Punk's discography. Aside from live performances, Envelop also hosts educational workshops and wellbeing days, and – listen up, UK readers – live streaming immersive events you can tune into from your own home. They hope to branch out of the Bay Area, and are already hosting pop-up venues around the world. **envelop.us**

WRIT LARGE

British mega-synth sizes up, again

Believe it or not, Analogue Solutions have given their renowned Colossus synthesiser a stackable sibling, which goes by the name of the Colossus AS200 Slim. A comparatively lighter and slimmer unit (though still enormous by all other standards), the Slim boasts the fundamentals of its predecessor. This includes 12 wave-variable oscillators, backlit signal meters, eight filters, four envelope generators, two spring reverbs, twin-pin matrixes and an oscilloscope. But the Slim can also be placed on top of the original Colossus (renamed as the AS100 Classic), meaning you can create a truly monumental Colossus Double System, measuring 145cm. The company are pegging it as both a synth and an installation.

"A Colossus Double System is incontrovertibly so much more than a powerful analogue 'workstation'," say Analogue Solutions. "It is also art and architecture incarnate." Curious? For £23,500, it's yours. **colossus-synth.com**



A LIFE WELL LIVED

New "intermedia" Conrad Schnitzler retrospective

A new exhibition about the life and work of Conrad Schnitzler has opened at the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, and it's a must for anyone who can make it. As well as looking at the German electronicist's pioneering work with Tangerine Dream and Kluster, 'Sometimes It Gets Out Of Hand And Turns Into Music' features an array of media – films of concerts, unique installations, rare vinyl and cassettes – to tell Schnitzler's singular story.

To accompany the exhibition, a festival of live music has been planned for July and August, with the programme including stellar artists such as Toulouse Low Trax and Razen, while several of Schnitzler's contemporaries will be presenting "cassette concerts", where they'll arrange Schnitzler's music to recreate a sonic history. The exhibition runs until 14 August – check the museum's website for tickets. **kunsthalle-duesseldorf.de**

LISTEN UP

Book explores what it means to be heard

As we all become lost in our digital bubbles, listening to others has become something of a forgotten art. But what makes a good listener? Is it a skill that can be learnt, or an innate talent? Psychoanalyst Anouchka Grose and violin maker Robert Brewer Young have joined forces, in what they call an "awkward duet", as they muse on what it means to hear. Exploring wide-ranging references from psychoanalytic theory, philosophy, contemporary politics and culture, 'Uneasy Listening: Notes On Hearing And Being Heard' is an engaging and often amusing read in which the pair, who began the project as strangers, begin to "accommodate, interrupt and perplex each other in an attempt to say something about what listening means". Published this month, order a copy now for £12. **mackbooks.co.uk**

GREEK STRATEGIES

Vangelis album in the works

The venerable Castles In Space label is set to release a Vangelis-inspired album, and they need your help.

"We're looking for contributions to this album project which will seek to salute the inspirational genius of Vangelis and invoke the spirit of his vast legacy," says label head Colin Morrison. "Not cover versions, but new pieces inspired by his mighty works." With a release date set for 29 March 2023 – what would have been the Greek composer's 80th birthday – you have until the end of July to submit recordings, and all proceeds will be donated to the Trussell Trust. Interested? Send your tracks to **submissions@castlesinspace.com**

TERRA FORMA

Elemental synth is “sanctuary for the soul”

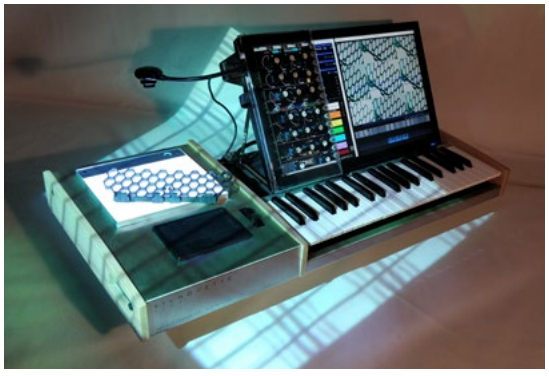
Polish-Russian developer SOMA Labs are never ones to shy away from the wilder end of the synth spectrum. Past machines include The Pipe, and the Quantum Ocean “psycho technics” binaural noise generator. Both featured in this mag, but neither were as eyebrow-raising as SOMA’s newest design, TERRA, a “highly conceptual” polyphonic microtonal synthesiser that combines nature and technology.

Housed in solid wood, it’s able to tune with an accuracy of 125 steps per semitone, while maintaining the range of a full grand piano. With an innovative design and various pitch-shifting and dynamic sensors, it allows for different modulations purely by simple intuitive movements of your hands and body. The TERRA is still in development, but sign up for updates at SOMA’s website. **somasynths.com**

SOUND AND COLOUR

Optical synth from Germany

Has a worthy successor to Daphne Oram’s legendary light-reading Oramics Machine finally arrived? Designer Pit Przygodda certainly hopes so, having dreamt up his Silhouette Eins optical synthesiser while a student of experimental film at HFBK University Of Fine Arts Hamburg in the early 1990s. Premiered at this year’s Superbooth synth festival, the light-sensitive instrument works by creating an array of analogue, wavetable and FM-style sounds, according to visual stimuli on its light plate or built-in screen – these could be objects, photographs or even moving images. Przygodda publicly counts Laurie Anderson, Brian Eno’s ‘Music For Installations’ and Robert Fripp’s ‘Frippertronics’ as inspirations for the device. Prospective buyers should set aside €3,800 and contact Przygodda directly. **silhouette-synthesizer.de**



PLAY TIME

A game-changing groovebox from Polyend

Polish developer Polyend has unveiled a powerful new sample and MIDI-based groovebox called Play. Touted by the company as “possibly the most fun, flexible and inspirational sample and MIDI-based groovebox ever”, the Play is nothing short of an awesomely powerful centrepiece for any hardware set-up. It features eight internal tracks of audio, eight polyphonic MIDI tracks, an array of onboard effects and storage for up to 128 patterns of 16 tracks. It’s also housed behind a tough, anodised aluminium faceplate hosting touch-capacitive knobs, mechanical keys and a 16x8 grid of responsive silicone pads, so it’s ready for your next tour. Sold? Us too. On preorder now for €799 and shipping in the autumn. **polyend.com**

THE REBEL ALLIANCE

Three synthesists join forces for good

Say hello to Uncompressed, the “world’s first synth-nerd supergroup”. The trio is made up of Kent’s Sam Battle, who you’ll no doubt be familiar with from YouTube synth channel Look Mum No Computer, Cuckoo (aka Oslo-based Norwegian/Swedish/Greek composer Andreas Paleologos) and German experimentalist Hainbach (Stefan Paul Goetsch). After announcing their formation with a humorous video, the trio made their debut last month at Barcelona’s Sónar festival and, by all accounts, smashed it out the park. If you want to support their work, you’re best off following their Patreon channel. **patreon.com/lookmumnocomputer**

MAL ADJUSTED

It's been nearly 30 years since Stephen Mallinder was last involved with Cabaret Voltaire, the act his name will always be associated with. Throughout that time, he's never stopped creating, innovating and pushing forward, but his story isn't as front and centre as you might expect. It's time for an adjustment...

WORDS: NEIL MASON

You find us in the Grand Parade Cafe & Canteen at Brighton University's City campus. The seaside is just down there and a short stroll that way is the city centre. On the other side of the floor-to-ceiling windows, the quadrangle is starting to fill with the lunchtime hubbub of students.

Some of them will be on the Digital Music and Sound Arts degree course, one of the tutors of which is Stephen Mallinder. That'll be Dr Mallinder to you. His PhD thesis, 'Movement: Journey Of The Beat', addresses "the trajectory and transition of popular culture through the modality of rhythm". He's also written academic papers and articles tackling subjects like the music of second-tier cities, the night-time economy, collaborative soundscapes, and the changing perceptions of music practices. It's unusual to find such an influential artist deconstructing their own work and experiences in this rigorous way. But then Mallinder is not your usual anything.

Oh, and he has a new solo album on the way too, 'Tick Tick Tick', which is why I am here. But there's some ground to cover before we get to that. And pretty much none of it is going to be what you expect.

The tale of Cabaret Voltaire is a path so well-trodden that we've had the paving slabs replaced several times. But what happened next, when Stephen Mallinder and Richard H Kirk went their separate ways, isn't a route that's travelled very often.

"It was planned," asserts Mal, as most people call him. "I spoke to Richard when I knew my second child was on the way and said, 'I'm going to need to take a break. This can sustain one person, but not two, particularly as this one here will soon have two kids'. So it was agreed."

Mal and Kirk would work on a final album, 'The Conversation', which came out in 1994, and then Cabaret Voltaire were no more.

Kirk's side of the story is perhaps better known. He continued to put out head-turning work with a tsunami of releases under a mountain of pseudonyms – chief among them Sandoz and Electronic Eye. In 2009, with Mal's blessing but not his participation, Kirk rebooted Cabaret Voltaire, remixing an album by New Zealand dub rock group Kora and collaborating with South Yorkshire outfit The Tivoli.

With a set of entirely new material, Kirk appeared at the Berlin Atonal festival in 2014 to perform the first Cabs live show in 20 years. In November 2020, an album arrived, the excellent 'Shadow Of Fear', the first Cabs release in 26 years. And then, in September 2021, just as Cabs 2.0 was building a head of steam, Richard H Kirk died, aged 65.

A renegade and a maverick, the uncompromising body of work Kirk has left behind, both with Cabaret Voltaire and in his own right, is almighty. Single-minded and resolute, he went his own way and continued to invent and reinvent right until the end.

His old friend since their Sheffield schooldays, the man sitting across from me at the canteen table couldn't be more different. While they share the same genes when it comes to innovation, creativity and progression, where Kirk was a lone wolf, Mal is an enabler, a facilitator, a serial collaborator. He not only wants to share his thoughts, his experiences and his know-how, you get the feeling he needs to.

"That's the way that it always was for me," he says. "Most art involves a co-operative aspect. Cabaret Voltaire was a collection of things that made it Cabaret Voltaire. It wasn't just me and Richard and Chris Watson. It was constructed through so many other parts – from designers to labels to audiences – who all fed into what we were. It was a working art project."

The Digital Music and Sound Arts degree is based in a classic 1960s multistorey block, recognisable to anyone who has been to art school in the last half-century. Indeed, the creative provision in Brighton is steeped in history, stretching back to 1859, when one of Britain's earliest art schools opened at the nearby Royal Pavilion.

My morning is spent tagging along with Mal as he does the rounds, like a doctor. A disco doctor. We flit in and out of recording studios, workshops and live spaces, the echoey corridors and staircases buzzing with students, many of them getting ready for their final year degree shows, while passing colleagues briefly stop for a chat and a joke.

In one lab, we find a pile of children's electronic toys with the guts ripped out of them, their sound cards being hacked for making very different sorts of noise. We crash an MA tutorial and meet a student who has been working on a concept using the massive reverb in the disused oil tanks at the Inchindown Fuel Depot, an abandoned military storage facility near Invergordon in the Scottish Highlands.

It seems slightly incongruous that this course exists alongside fine artists, illustrators, sculptors and printmakers. So my first question is, what exactly is a Digital Music and Sound Arts degree?

"It's an art course… but with sound," explains Mal as we head for the canteen. "Our second-year students are currently doing group work, for example, and we've got one lot using a corridor with speakers in the ceiling to create linear sound. There are groups working on spatialisation, immersive sound, resonance, and creating a performance with shortwave radio."

You can see why he is at home here. The ideas flying around aren't far off the sort of thinking evident in the loft of Chris Watson's house in Sheffield at the dawn of Cabaret Voltaire. Our perception of Stephen Mallinder is one thing, but are the students aware of him and his work when they arrive here?

"I do get a few saying, 'Can me dad have your autograph?'," admits Mal as we settle down with our sandwiches. "But I don't make anything out of it. After a while, I think they know that I've got some history. It becomes part of the conversation, because obviously the point of me being here is to bring some of that into what I do."

You've never been tempted to pull the old "Don't you know who I am?" line?

"I've always tried to avoid that," he insists, his face breaking into a smile. "They should take me for who I am, not for who I think I am."

Not for the last time today, he dissolves into raucous laughter.

Looking back in order to move forward is what all good art courses should do. Having Mal attached to the Brighton course – sharing his knowledge and experience, giving back, motivating others – is how work like this thrives. But how did Mal's own journey into sound begin? Who handed him the batons?

"My education came from my family's record collection and from their interest in music," he says. "My dad died when I was four, so I never knew him, but he played violin. And my auntie played piano. I come from a massive family, there are loads of us, so at Christmas and at parties my auntie would be banging out the show tunes. The music seeped through us.

"My two older sisters were both important in terms of my musical education too. We didn't own many records because we were quite poor – my mum was a dinner lady and she brought up three kids on her own. Music was something other people bought, but I listened to. The first record I remember – and fuck knows why we had it – was John Leyton's 'Johnny Remember Me', produced by Joe Meek. I didn't know who Meek was, I was only eight or nine, but I got that there was this strange, electronic kind of vibe going on there."

The magical world of radio also played a significant role in his formative years. His sisters listened to the latest pop hits on Radio Luxembourg, with tracks like The Tornados' 'Telstar' – another Joe Meek production – catching Mal's young ears.

"We had a radiogram in the front room," he says. "It looked like an eagle and it was all walnut, with this exotic tuning dial and a speaker in the middle. It had these lovely rich bass tones. It was beautiful."

The radio would generally be tuned to the BBC Light Programme, the national station that eventually became Radio 1 and Radio 2. On Saturday mornings, there was a show specifically aimed at children ('Children's Choice', later renamed 'Junior Choice').

"The record they played that really got me was called 'Sparky's Magic Piano'," recalls Mal. "It's about a kid learning to play the piano and the instrument starts talking to him in a voice that sounds like this primitive vocoder, which was very eerie. Those connections – of radio, electronics and spooky noises – must have been imprinted on me when I was quite little.

"And then, when I was about 12 or 13, I started living through my brother-in-law's record collection. He had Johnny Cash's live album, 'Johnny Cash At Folsom Prison', and the Jacques Loussier Trio and Thelonious Monk. The records I particularly liked were split seven-inch EPs with Chuck Berry on one side and Bo Diddley on the other. I fucking loved Bo Diddley and his railroad rhythms."

He doesn't remember getting his own radio (he thinks he inherited an old transistor set along the way), but he can clearly recall his mum buying him a tape recorder.

"Do you know what I used to do with it?" he asks with a grin. "I used to play Subbuteo with my cousin and we'd record ourselves commentating."

It wasn't long before he put his ability to record whatever he liked to better use. As he got older, a whole world of music opened up via the radio and the television – BBC studio sessions from Alexis Korner and live sets by Captain Beefheart on 'The Old Grey Whistle Test'. Getting into actually making it took another leap of imagination, though.

"You were either being formally taught to read music or you had mates you could play with. That's what I did with Richard and Chris. But it wasn't like, 'My mate's a bass player, my other mate's a drummer, I'm a keyboard player… hey, we've got a band!'. The big thing for us was seeing Brian Eno with Roxy Music on TV and he was using a Revox as an instrument. We thought, 'You can use a tape machine as an instrument?'."

And Eno looked mental.

"Well, that's why punk happened," declares Mal. "Roxy represented this whole other dimension of what music could be."

From the railroad rhythms of Bo Diddley, which Mal would go on to write about in his thesis, to the vocoded voice on 'Sparky's Magic Piano' and the otherworldly productions of Joe Meek, to the blues of Alexis Korner and on to Brian Eno wigging out with his Revox, Cabaret Voltaire were born on radio waves and TV signals.

Righto. Let's take a breather. Usually at this point you'd expect a deep dive into the Cabaret Voltaire legend. Not this time. We're skipping all that.

You rejoin us near where we came in. For Mal, the Cabs stopped in 1994. For many, he would only reappear in 2012, collaborating with Fila Brazillia's Steve Cobby as Hey, Rube! before forming Wrangler with Ben "Benge" Edwards and Tunng's Phil Winter. Which leaves us with a hiatus of almost two decades.

"After the recession in 1991, it became harder for us to make money as the Cabs," reflects Mal as he begins to fill in the missing years. "Everything was starting to feel a bit strange musically – it was all house music and instrumental ambient stuff… and I wasn't sure what my place was in that. I knew I didn't want to just keep doing what we'd been doing forever, but I was worried about my kids, I was worried about money, and I realised I had to do something else because I couldn't afford to live like that. And certainly not in London. So I had to make a move."

He was Mal from the Cabs, but there was no longer any Cabs for him to be Mal from. So what now?

"The choices we had as a family were to move back to Sheffield or fuck off completely," he confides. "And I didn't want to go to Sheffield. I still spend loads of time there, and I love it, but at the time it was just… I don't think Richard would have liked it if I'd moved back. We'd been to Oz for a holiday a couple of times because my wife, my first wife, was Australian, so I suppose the idea of disappearing out there worked."

Didn't the thought of a move like that feel a bit like a defeat?

"I think it was just a fear of not knowing how to take that next step," he says. "Whatever I did, it felt as though I'd be visible."

Like people were waiting for your next move?

"Making music all those years and then going, 'Well, I've got to do something else now', was really hard to come to terms with," he admits. "I didn't know how to deal with it. If I was going to reinvent myself, which I thought I needed to do, it would be harder in England. Whereas the invisibility of Australia meant I could do it there with much less pressure. So I ran away."

In 1995, his family moved to Perth, on the west coast of Australia, where Mal could start again – personally, professionally and creatively. There was only one problem…

"Did I have a plan?" he asks, repeating my question. "Not really, no. I wanted to do some studying, so I trained as a schoolteacher. But to be a teacher over there, your first job had to be out in the bush. By the time I qualified, I'd been in Australia for a year. I was making music again and I had started doing a bit of radio. So it was like, 'I'm not going to pack this in to go and work in the bush'."

Out of interest, what would Mr Mallinder have taught?

"Maths," he says, before letting out a huge laugh. "I was shit at maths, but they needed maths teachers."

With thoughts of teaching canned (for now), he became increasingly involved in his local arts radio station in Perth, RTRFM, where he became a producer.

"I worked on the morning programmes, covering politics, art and technology," he tells me. "After a while, I asked if I could have a show of my own. I had to earn my stripes, so I did the graveyard shift for a year on a show called 'The Ambient Zone'."

Why radio? Well, of course, we've already been there. Whether it was the BBC Light Programme, or the Top 30 singles chart on Radio Luxembourg, or John Peel on Radio 1 – Monday to Thursday, 10pm to midnight – all that possibility floating in on the ether and filling young minds is dizzying.

The first time I heard Cabaret Voltaire was on John Peel, my little transistor set tucked under my pillow in age-old fashion, 'Sluggin' Fer Jesus (Part One)' coming in like, well, the railroad rhythms of Bo Diddley, with the ghostly voice of the evangelical preacher riding on top. I know I'm repeating myself, but Cabaret Voltaire were born on the same radio waves I heard them on for the first time. It makes my head spin. Anyway, back to Mal…

"I ended up doing another show on RTRFM which was pretty successful," he continues. "It was a drive-time electronic music show called 'Full Frequency'. I did it for nine years."

It's still going today (not with Mal, obviously) on weekdays from 3pm to 5pm. You can tune in online. But here's the thing about Mal's stint in the presenter's chair. When artists arrived on tour in Perth, which they did on a regular basis, they were asked if they wanted a spot on the local arts radio station, you know, to talk up their gig.

"Anyone who was passing through, they all used to come in," he beams. "Loads of the house guys, the techno guys. And the Cabs have that influence across house, techno, hip hop, so when they arrived they were like, 'Oh, fucking hell, it's Mal off the Cabs'."

Running away had turned into landing on his feet. With Richard Kirk buzzing away in his Sheffield HQ, his old partner in crime was also embarking on exciting new adventures. Only he was doing it thousands of miles away and no one seemed to notice.

"I set up a label called Off World Sounds," he says. "We put out 30-odd releases and we had this live production company doing some big gigs, shows with 20,000 people. I was making a lot of music too."

Mal formed Sassi & Loco with Travis Calley, the keyboard player from Yummy Fur, a Perth band he'd met when he produced them. There was also Ku-Ling Bros, a project with Shane Norton, whose work as Soundlab he picked up for his label. He released several compilations as well, featuring artists from the vibrant local electronic scene, a scene that seemed to have galvanised around Mal. Of course.

"I originally started Off World Sounds because I needed an outlet for Sassi & Loco," he notes. "But I liked the idea of a label and I wanted to use it to work with other people. I love that idea of communities and connections and building these cultures."

He ran OWS with Pete Carroll, who he knew from Manchester. Pete is the brother of Pat and Matt Carroll of Central Station Design, who were responsible for the look of Factory's second wave, creating record covers and posters for Happy Mondays, Black Grape, James and more. The Mondays' iconic 'Madchester' artwork was one of theirs. The Carrolls also had Shaun Ryder for a cousin.

"Pete washed up in Australia a few years before I did," explains Mal. "He was one of the heads of Sony out there, but when I arrived he was way more interested in doing the label with me."

While poking through the imprint's back catalogue, I found a record that I love, but I'd had no idea it was on OWS. Amateur Night In The Big Top's self-titled album was released in 2003 and came complete with a sticker that read, "Introducing Shaun William Ryder – an original". Copies of the CD are currently shifting for £3 on Discogs. You can thank me later.

"Shaun came over to Oz to try and clean himself up," says Mal. "He was in quite a rough way. He was in a different space, dealing with a bad drug habit, and we made an album with him almost as therapy. We did a lot of it in Pete's garage. We would have to wait until three in the morning, usually after Shaun had had a pint of sherry, then we'd record him telling stories and doing his vocals. But he's Shaun – he brushes himself down… he's a survivor."

So how did Mal go from radio show host, label big cheese and live promoter in Australia to lecturing at Brighton University back in the UK?

"Well, there is this wonderful person, a cultural academic called Professor Tara Brabazon, and she worked at one of the universities in Australia," he reveals. "She used to love my radio show, which is how we met. I was talking about writing a book and she said, 'Why don't you write a thesis?'. She said, 'You can turn the PhD into a book and I can get you some funding to buy you the time to write it'."

Which is exactly what he did.

"I'd written two-thirds of it when Tara became Professor of Media here at Brighton. By that point, we had written a few academic papers together and she wanted me to come over to the UK so we could use my research. I came back for a year in 2007 and I've been here ever since."

The ideas that Mal nurtured Down Under are still very much in evidence in his work today. Wrangler are a collective based around Benge's MemeTune Studios in Cornwall and they draw John Grant into their orbit for their Creep Show offshoot. What's more, Mal's manager, Steve Malins, looks after an impressive stable of similarly self-starting and self-sufficient artists, including John Foxx, Hannah Peel, Blancmange and Gazelle Twin.

Many of these artists cross-pollinate. Benge and Peel are both in John Foxx And The Maths, while Mal is currently preparing to go on tour supporting Blancmange. You won't be surprised to learn that 'Off World Sounds: Building A Collaborative Soundscape', an article Mal wrote with Tara Brabazon for the Journal Of Media And Culture in 2006, expands on this thinking.

Mal's third solo album, 'Tick Tick Tick', is also a product of the collective. Written at his home in Brighton, it was recorded at MemeTune. It follows 2019's 'Um Dada', which in turn was a rather tardy turnaround from his debut solo outing, 'Pow-Wow', which came out in 1982.

Three solo albums in, you know, a million years. That's pretty slack.

"It's rubbish really, isn't it?" laughs Mal. "What have I been doing all this time?"

If you need a peg to hang your coat on, 'Tick Tick Tick' is in the ballpark of Cabaret Voltaire's 'Micro-Phonies' or 'The Covenant, The Sword And The Arm Of The Lord'. It has an electro feel and utilises those same kinds of sounds, but it's way less abrasive. The mid-80s Cabs had the funk going on. Here, Mal adds the soul.

'Shock To The Body' is a killer floorfiller, with machines firing on every cylinder, pinging all over the place, while 'Hush' seems instantly familiar. The melody is infectious, the rich and relaxed bassline locking into an off-kilter groove while hi-hats, handclaps and assorted percussion rattle away. There's a real warmth and charm in Mal's solo work. How would he describe his sound?

"There's a level of understatement and subtlety and a little wonkiness in there," he muses. "I'm subconsciously the sum of so many things and I suppose the solo records are just how all that manifests itself."

What makes a release a Stephen Mallinder solo album? Three in nearly 40 years suggests it's a special occasion. What prompts him to get to work?

"I don't go into a big sort of, 'Right, I want to make a Stephen Mallinder record'," he says. "I make music all the time, but I've always been reluctant to put my own name to things. Music has a social component… we don't create in isolation. I enjoy doing my own stuff, but I love the process of working with other people, so I've never really felt the need to go, 'Oh, this is me'."

While I get that other people are inevitably involved along the way with everything Mal does, I'm intrigued by his hesitancy in taking the credit where credit is due.

"Benge worked with me on the production for 'Tick Tick Tick' and 'Um Dada', but I'm the one saying, 'This is what I want to do, this is how I want to take it'," he offers. "When I'm with Wrangler or Creep Show, it's all up for negotiation. But even if you're making music on your own, you don't exist in a vacuum. You're influenced by so many things. In my case, it draws on my past, on the people I've worked with, on everything I've listened to and seen. It's always a composite and you're just the tip of the iceberg."

So what makes up the 'Tick Tick Tick' iceberg?

"With this and 'Um Dada', I went in with the same idea," he says, a broad smile beginning to break out in anticipation of his next statement. "Finding somewhere on the spectrum between The Jackson 5 and Terry Riley. That was it."

I only have to raise my eyebrows.

"The Jackson Five? Well, it could have been The Brothers Johnson, I could've gone for anything really, but I think it was about weirdness and joy at the same time. The album explores minimalism and the ideas of repetition, groove and syncopation. That and somehow marrying the characteristics of electronic sound with the bedrock of rhythmic music."

And the non-scholarly explanation?

"It's got basslines and disco beats and things," he grins.

Things like cowbells?

"There is a cowbell on every track," he confesses. "I'm not a massive fucking snare kind of guy, but I do love percussion. I love a clap, but there's something about a cowbell. It has a natural groove that carries a rhythm without it being overt."

Did you have to rein yourself in at any point?

"No, no, no," he says, shaking his head slowly. "It became a bit of an in-joke by the end, but there is no such thing as too much cowbell. It is quite discreet and on certain tracks you sort of go, 'I don't know if there's a cowbell in there…', but there is."

Anything else in the mixing pot you'd care to share while we're at it?

"I was going for that Arthur Russell vibe. I love his stuff, I love that it has a natural groove. There's a lightness and a flow, with his voice gliding and flittering above. But there was no individual template for this album. We live in a world where we just skim and everything is like a smorgasbord of music. The days when you'd go, 'I heard The Velvet Underground, so I want to be like The Velvet Underground', are gone. It's like a whole series of dots… and each time we join them together, we draw a different picture. On this occasion, these are the dots that I used."

And what did you draw?

"I wanted to keep a connection to Detroit and techno, to Moodymann and people like that. I was also listening to bits of vaporwave and lots of dubstep."

Vaporwave? That's interesting.

"'Hush' and 'Wasteland' started off very vaporwave. We were recording instruments and then slowing everything down. The tracks didn't end up as vaporwave, but they started off in that languid way."

He mentions that 'Tick Tick Tick' is a more personal record, noting that the lyrics are perhaps closer to his own experiences than would be the case for a shared project.

"I think they are," he says. "I'm writing very broadly about societal implications. They're quite minimal, just sentiments of the daily trials, the everyday struggles. I also tried to sneak a few cultural and literary references in. I got Franz Kafka and JG Ballard in there."

Is there, I wonder, a difference between the work of solo Mal and collaborative Mal? Are his solo albums perhaps the introvert side of him and his partnerships the extrovert?

"I'm not a particularly loud person when I'm on my own," he confirms. "I'm much louder and more bombastic when I'm with other people."

So does writing and recording with Wrangler or Creep Show ever mean he has to fight for oxygen in the room?

"There are times when it feels like there's a tension," he replies. "In a good way, though. And there are other times when we just let it flow. We are quite loose with each other. In Creep Show, with both John and myself doing vocals, we find ways of making that work. He's got a far more astute idea of where he's going, so I'll often let him roll with it, and there are times when he lets me roll with it."

Earlier on, as my train was pulling into Brighton station, Mal sent me a text.

"Morning, I'm here, outside Superdrug," it said. I resisted the temptation to text back, "The glamour!".

Stephen Mallinder has been at the forefront of experimental electronic music for more than four decades, his name is synonymous with groundbreaking innovation, and he's waiting for me outside Superdrug. The thought makes me laugh, but I've known him for a while and he's just Mal doing what Mal does.

Like me, John Grant grew up with the sound of Cabaret Voltaire ringing in his ears. If you've seen Creep Show play live, you'll know that his face says, "I can't quite believe I'm here, it's like I'm in Cabaret Voltaire". To Mal, that doesn't figure. He seems unaware of the sort of clout he carries.

"When Creep Show played at Sensoria for the first time a couple of years ago, John was buzzing," says Mal. "It was like, 'He knows this, he really knows this'. I'd never actually stopped and thought about what I might mean to other people with what I've done. I guess John is a living embodiment."

And that's what you did, I point out.

"I know," he says, nodding and taking it in for a few moments. "It's quite special, isn't it? It's like, 'Oh, wow, it wasn't all just a waste of time'."

'Tick Tick Tick' is out now on Dais

WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM HIS FRIENDS

Stephen Mallinder may have just three solo albums to his name, but he's been a serial collaborator throughout his career. Here are some of his finest moments...

WORDS: NEIL MASON

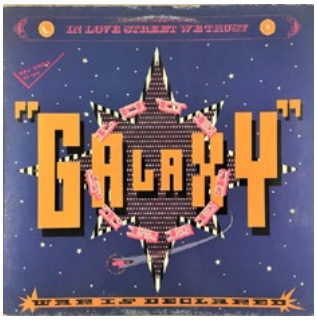
ERIC RANDOM MEETS THE BEDLAMITES

'Earthbound Ghost Need'

NEW HORMONES ALBUM, 1982

Recorded with Buzzcocks associate Eric Random at Western Works in Sheffield, Cargo in Rochdale and Revolution in Manchester. Featuring Stephen Mallinder on bass and Richard H Kirk on horns.

Mal says: "I'd met Eric at the infamous Buzzcocks Lyceum show, when Cabaret Voltaire played with them. The Slits and John Cooper Clarke played too. We became great friends and Eric would come and stay with me when we were recording at Western Works. This was the album that captured those sessions and subsequent recordings over the Pennines. I still work with Eric sometimes. We recently did a track with Mark Stewart, 'Cast No Shadow', for his new album."



LOVE STREET

'Galaxy'

PARLOPHONE 12-INCH, 1988

Wow! A proper supergroup – consisting of Mal, FON/Warp kingpin Robert Gordon, Soft Cell's Dave Ball, Chakk's Jake Harries and Krush singer Ruth Joy – covering War's 1977 monster funk romp.

Mal says: "This was a little thing on the side, driven largely by Chakk's manager Amrik Rai. He had the idea of pulling some of the different FON/Warp elements together, plus myself and Dave Ball, to pay homage to a band and a track that we all loved. It also had a daft video made by photographer Eddie Monsoon. Weirdly, it was a hit in Italy, or so I was told. I think Parlophone wanted a return on their investment!"

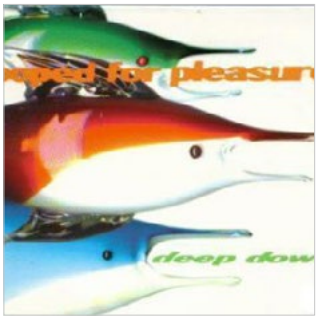
ACID HORSE

'No Name, No Slogan'

WAX TRAX! 12-INCH, 1989

Billed as "A spaghetti western soundtrack (without a film)", this was a one-off meeting between Cabaret Voltaire and Ministry. Everybody involved appears under a pseudonym – Biff (Mal), Harold Sandoz (Kirk), Alien Dog Star (Al Jourgensen), Tennessee King (Paul Barker) and Gallopin' Scorpiosaddlebutt (Chris Connelly).

Mal says: "This was a totally undercover operation. We were in Chicago for a month, recording with Marshall Jefferson and house artists like Sleazy D, Ten City and Paris Brightledge, but we were doing night sessions and had the days to ourselves. We'd been hanging out with Ministry, so we decided to record the Acid Horse stuff, which is an alternative take on house rhythms. EMI paid for our sessions with Marshall and they would have kicked off if they'd found out we were working on the side, so we all adopted pseudonyms. I did a guest vocal for Chris Connelly's solo album a couple of years ago."



KU-LING BROS

'Creach'

OFF WORLD SOUNDS ALBUM, 1999

The big beat years! Scratching, sampling, weighty basslines and breakbeats galore were the major hallmarks of this album with Shane Norton from Soundlab. Mal had moved to Australia by this point, settling in Perth on the west coast and starting his Off World Sounds label in 1996.

Mal says: "This was originally intended as a production project. I'd been asked to do a Sneaker Pimps remix and I needed a sampler. So I grabbed Shane, whose Soundlab stuff was set for release on my label, and we ended up doing 'Creach'. We also did 'Eat The Rich', which was a remix record, and then worked with Shaun Ryder on his Amateur Night In The Big Top album. We took the Ku-Ling Bros out of the studio and played live as a six-piece too. There's some BBC footage somewhere of myself, Shane, Shaun, and Kiriakos Lucas, the guitarist from Yummy Fur, playing in a bar."

SASSI & LOCO

'Boom Claat'

OFF WORLD SOUNDS ALBUM, 2001

A truly perfect open-the-windows sunny summer's day listen with Mal and Yummy Fur keyboardist Travis Calley getting all dubby. Not to be confused with the Scottish band The Yummy Fur, this lot are just Yummy Fur.

Mal says: "I'd been doing bits of production for Yummy Fur, a Perth band signed to Sony. We became very good friends and I did some recordings with Travis, their keyboard player. We never played live, but we did compile all the tracks we'd made for this album, which comes with what is probably my favourite artwork from Central Station Design."

LOOPED FOR PLEASURE

'Deep Down'

OFF WORLD SOUNDS ALBUM, 2002

A great collection of supercharged house grooves. Looped For Pleasure contributed the track 'City Lights' to the seven-inch that accompanied Electronic Sound Issue 31 in 2017.

Mal says: "This is my best mates from Rotherham, Sean Maloney and Mark Swancott, who were in Screaming Trees and later became big garage and 2-step producers. We've been doing stuff together for years – we still are! – and I'm currently going through some of our many unheard tracks for a full release. I'm just waiting for the last couple of mixes, which are nearly done. My friend Steve Allott is also involved. He's the voice of both dissent and reason in the background, pulling faces at us if it's not right."

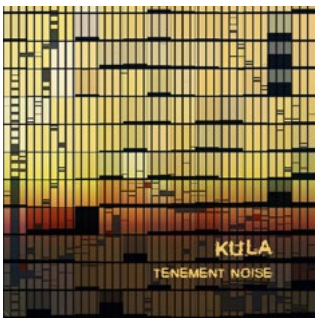
AMATEUR NIGHT IN THE BIG TOP

'Amateur Night In The Big Top'

OFF WORLD SOUNDS ALBUM, 2003

Mal hooks up with Pete Carroll and his cousin, Shaun William Ryder. Recorded in a Perth garage in the dead of night.

Mal says: "We did this at such a mad time for Shaun and it still seems to be either people's favourite or most hated record. The Guardian said, 'Mal should know better'. Perhaps having Hitler, Thatcher and Saddam Hussein on the cover shaped the response, but it's Shaun and he's a complete one-off. To this day, I love 'The Story', although the vocal is heavily redacted because the original version would destroy careers. Never regret anything."



BILLIE RAY MARTIN

'The Crackdown Project'

DISCO ACTIVISTO ALBUM, 2010

Electribe 101 singer Billie Ray Martin takes on two Cabaret Voltaire classics, 'Crackdown' and 'Just Fascination', serving up endless remixes in the process. The record is billed as featuring Stephen Mallinder alongside German duo Märtini Brös and British producer Lusty Zanzibar.

Mal says: "I'd known Billie when she was living in London during the Electribe 101 years and had always thought her vocals were great. She has an incredibly emotive voice. She asked if I would contribute to this and do the tracks with her. The video for 'Crackdown' is a reworking of Peter Care's original and it's very political and angry."

HEY, RUBE!

'Can You Hear Me Mutha?'

STEEL TIGER ALBUM, 2012

With Mal back in the UK, this saw the Yorkshire massive – Sheffield meets Hull – in full effect. Stephen Mallinder and Fila Brazillia's Steve Cobby was an inspired partnership.

Mal says: "Steve and I go back to the early FON/Warp days and Fila Brazillia had put stuff out on Off World Sounds. I spent a lot of time recording with Steve, to the point where Hull became a second home for me. This album was the result of our hilarious sessions together – brothers in arms!"

KULA

'Tenement Noise'

KLANGGALERIE EP, 2014

Four mixes of a track recorded with Ron Wright, frontman of acclaimed Sheffield outfit Hula… which is about as much as we can tell you. Mal?

Mal says: "This is a bit of a mystery to me as well! It comes from an unearthed reel-to-reel recording of Hula that I had apparently made in 1981… but have no clear memory of. It's totally feasible because I shared a house with the band – the mythological castle Hula Kula – so I should imagine it came from there. Anyway, Ron and myself agreed that we would each do an extended mix from the original recording for this release."

WRANGLER

'LA Spark'

MEMETUNE ALBUM, 2014

Mal plus Phil Winter from Tunng and Benge from John Foxx And The Maths. Wrangler's debut album surely needs no further introduction.

Mal says: "I have known Phil since the early 80s and we were always getting together to play, record, DJ and party in London. When I came back to the UK, Phil told me I had to meet Benge, so I went to see him in the studio. We'd recorded our first seven-inch within two hours and we haven't stopped since. The three of us have the greatest chemistry. We bounce off each other – and usually the walls! I really cherish working with Phil and Benge and I'm so glad we all hooked up."

COBBY & MALLINDER

'Tumblefish' / 'Vitamin C'

THRONE OF BLOOD 12-INCH, 2016

Another release with Steve Cobby, this time a 12-inch featuring an original track and a great Can cover version, but no longer credited to Hey, Rube!.

Mal says: "When we were doing the Hey, Rube! stuff, Steve was saying, 'The trouble is, if you don't have your name on a record, the way algorithms work, nobody will fucking find it', so we changed the name for practical reasons. We went through so many iterations to get to the final version of 'Vitamin C' – all kinds of constructions and instrumentation. We started with the intention of doing an album of covers, but we gave up after this. We realised that reworking tracks you love is pretty much impossible because you can never do them justice."

CREEP SHOW

'Mr Dynamite'

BELLA UNION ALBUM, 2018

Wrangler plus John Grant. Electronic Sound's Album Of The Year in 2018 – and for good reason.

Mal says: "John first appeared at the soundcheck when Wrangler played with Chris & Cosey at their Sensoria show in Sheffield, although John gives me shit for not remembering meeting him with Robin Guthrie at a Moloko gig years before. We gravitated towards each other from that moment. We did a Wrangler remix of 'Voodoo Doll', supported him at the Albert Hall, and then finally played as a 'band' at the Barbican for Rough Trade's 40th anniversary in 2016. John is one of the most creative, funny and wonderful people I've ever met. We have a ball when we're working. The only hard bit about the whole project was agreeing a name… Cattle Grid? Tupperware Party? For fuck's sake!"

MZYLKYPOP

'Presents Xzyles'

DO IT THISSEN 12-INCH EP, 2019

There's so much to love about this scuzzy funk four-tracker. Mal, Mick Somerset, Adi Newton, Dean Honer, Pete Hope, Simon Lewinski, Martin Archer… it's a proper old school Sheffield supergroup released on a brilliant new school Sheffield label.

Mal says: "This was drawn together by Mick Somerset, who is my oldest friend. We've known each other since we were 14 years old. He's part of Sheffield's musical DNA. From soul bands, through Clock DVA, Floy Joy and the brilliant Crooked Man, he has shaped the city's sound as much as anyone. And he's a style icon. If Mick asks me to do something, I'll do it, no questions asked – from recording, playing live, doing spoken word, or writing press releases. To be fair, we all do. Just ask Dean Honer."

CAMPBELL, MALLINDER, BENGE

'Clinker'

LES DISQUES DU CRÉPUSCULE ALBUM, 2021

Benge unearths some old synth sketches that are turned into post-punk belters with the help of Mal and LoneLady.

Mal says: "This had been gestating under the ground for a long time and then it all happened very quickly. We were in lockdown, so the final tweaks on the album happened remotely. It's a wonderful collision of sounds and Julie's guitar is such a vibrant element. Even though she's been on Wrangler recordings and played with us live, it's something that I've missed so much without realising it. This worked so well."

KLING KLANG MAN

Ahead of the UK release of his autobiography, 'The Sound Of The Machine', Karl Bartos opens up about working with Ralf and Florian, unpublished demo recordings, and how pioneering technology helped to create Kraftwerk's extraordinary legacy

WORDS: MARK ROLAND
PICTURES: NEIL THOMSON

For a band so significant, Kraftwerk literature is notably thin on the ground. Such omerta is quite an achievement in the ultra-sharing computer world they so precisely anticipated. Yet previous attempts at biographies have been hobbled by a lack of input, and even legal hostility, from Ralf Hütter and Florian Schneider. The only insider account until now, Wolfgang Flür's 2000 book, 'Kraftwerk: I Was A Robot', famously fell foul of the Kling Klang legal department.

While that memoir was highly entertaining, Wolfgang wasn't a Kraftwerk songwriter, so his viewpoint was always going to be at a slight remove. All of which is why Karl Bartos' autobiography, 'The Sound Of The Machine: My Life In Kraftwerk And Beyond', finally published in English after its 2017 German edition, has been so keenly anticipated. After all, this is the man who co-wrote every Kraftwerk track from 'The Man-Machine' to 'Electric Café'.

A citizen of Hamburg for many years now, Karl tackles my first and obvious question genially. What took you so long?

"I was late, I know," he says apologetically. "It took me a long time to get it done. It's really heavy and time-consuming. It was like mining ground. Everywhere it was dangerous. My ex-partner" – he means Ralf, of course – "claimed to have a lot of humour, but it's nothing to laugh about now."

So why write it at all?

"For a long time, there was only one Kraftwerk narrative," he says. "I think it's time to open up a second perspective. After all, three composers and one poet were involved in our music, not one ex-member of the classic line-up and some engineers. I wanted to look at everything again, analyse it and draw the right conclusions. The fairy tale told over and over about our music, our time together and the different roles was in dire need of an addition or two from me. One person, even if he was able to buy the brand name, didn't create the musical work alone."

Since his departure from the band in 1990, around the time of 'The Mix', Karl has had plenty of opportunities to reflect on his tenure.

"You know, I left Kraftwerk 30 years ago, and since then I've given many interviews," he says. "And there were always Kraftwerk questions, but I tried to stick to the music and not the turmoil. I had the feeling that if I was to make my point, I would have to know *exactly* what I was talking about. So I have gone through an analysis of it. I needed to put down all the facts and everything I could remember about the old music."

In this particular endeavour, he was helped by a stash which will have Kraftwerk obsessives in a whirl.

"I still have 50 or 60 demo recordings from the Kling Klang studio," he laughs. "I don't know what to do with them. I can't release them, but they're really funny, with vocals on them, pre-recordings, improvisations…"

It goes without saying, dear reader, that these won't be appearing on a boxset near you any time soon. We can only imagine what treasures remain locked away. But Karl's book provides probably the most vivid descriptions of the production process and the circumstances surrounding it that we're ever likely to read.

Given the testy history of lawsuits in Kraftwerk's past, have there been any reactions from Kling Klang to Karl's tome?

"Not yet," he smiles. "Radio silence."

'The Sound Of The Machine' is primarily the story of Karl Bartos, from his origins in Bavaria, through the family's relocation to Düsseldorf and his intensive training as a classical musician at the city's Robert Schumann Conservatory, to finding himself tooling down the fast lane of the Autobahn in 1974 in the cold embrace of Kling Klang, where he stayed, through good and bad, for the next 16 years.

The book starts off in Bavaria, with Karl visiting Marktschellenberg, surrounded by the kind of picture-postcard beauty roughly rendered on the poster that came with early pressings of 'Trans-Europe Express'. It's clear how Karl's conflicting emotions about home ("I take the next flight to Hamburg – with the start of my autobiography in my head and an ambivalent Heimat feeling in my heart," he writes) informed Kraftwerk's conceptual and satirical framework for 'Radio-Activity' and 'Trans-Europe Express'. On the one hand, each evokes a romantic German past. On the other, they both skew German nostalgia.

He goes on to describe how his own love of music was awakened by the opening chord of The Beatles' 'A Hard Day's Night'. His subsequent announcement that he wanted to leave a safe, blue-collar apprenticeship and study music instead ignited a fiery bust-up with his father, and that decision circuitously led to Kling Klang.

Karl was hired by Kraftwerk in 1974. Having added Wolfgang Flür to their duo the previous year, they needed a fourth member to bolster the line-up for a tour of the USA, following the unexpected success of 'Autobahn'. Ralf and Florian were looking for a classically trained percussionist and approached Düsseldorf's Robert Schumann Conservatory to find one.

At this point in time, Karl was enjoying a creative life of what he calls "cultural polyphony" – a multifaceted musical existence. He had countless performances with the Düsseldorf Symphony Orchestra and Deutsche Oper Am Rhein under his belt, he'd played a tour with the American choreographer Lester Wilson, who would go on to choreograph the film 'Saturday Night Fever', and was gigging with various groups. His three-year apprenticeship with the German Post Office/telephone company, leading to a job he barely did, had included a role in the works band, playing at the many events the huge organisation would hold. It seems outlandish these days, but he was also free to attend classes at the Conservatory.

By the time that Ralf and Florian got to him, Karl was steeped in music – classical, avant-garde, pop, soul and funk – as much at home with Varèse, Stockhausen and Cage as he was with Lennon-McCartney, JS Bach, Ravel and Debussy.

The Kraftwerk connection came in autumn 1974. With typical efficiency, Karl recorded the time and date of his first encounter with the Kling Klang studio at Mintropstrasse 16 – 5.30pm on 4 October. Two weeks later, Ralf collected him from the Opera House after a performance to join them for a nighttime Kraftwerk session. It would be the first of many.

"Within Kraftwerk, I experienced one of the most fascinating encounters of creativity in my life," Karl says. "In the beginning, Ralf often picked me up from the stage entrance at the opera house late at night and we'd drive to the Kling Klang Studio to improvise with Florian. Come to think of it, I brought the tradition, the life and spiritual power of classical music to this environment."

To read 'The Sound Of The Machine' is to experience Kraftwerk through the lens of classical music. The melody Ralf came up with for 'Europe Endless' reminds Karl of the duet 'Wer Uns Getraut' from 'The Gypsy Baron', the operetta by Johann Strauss II. Talking about 'Trans-Europe Express' brings up a reference to Arthur Honegger's 'Pacific 231', and he recalls suggesting that Ralf use fourths on the Orchestron, like Stravinsky.

"Ralf and Florian had no experience whatsoever with music in other contexts," he asserts. "Of course, there is a difference between buying a record by Richard Wagner or Karlheinz Stockhausen and talking about it enigmatically in interviews, then playing these works in concert. But since I was also familiar with pop and free forms of music, I was able to adapt to my former partners. The music produced in our writing sessions back then carries the soul of our work together. And it seems to be so robust that it survives as a substitute in a digital business model."

In some ways, Karl Bartos' story reads a bit like a novel. A hard-working, unpretentious young man from a modest, working-class background, expected to go into a trade, has his life course radically altered by the unexpected and overwhelmingly powerful discovery of his love of music. One moment he's learning how to wire telephone exchanges, the next he's wearing a dress suit as a percussionist in an orchestra, then he's being inducted into Kraftwerk and entering the gilded world of Ralf and Florian.

After the American 'Autobahn' tour, Karl balanced his classical studies with his Kraftwerk life. On the same day the Sex Pistols played the first of their legendary Manchester gigs in 1976, he was in the orchestra pit for a performance of Sergei Prokofiev's 'The Tale Of The Stone Flower' and had already contributed to the recording of 'Radio-Activity'.

Shortly before graduating from the Conservatory, he moved into a flat in Düsseldorf's leafy Berger Allee, a five-minute drive from the Kling Klang studio in Mintropstrasse, where he lived with Ralf, Wolfgang and Emil Schult. The enigmatic Florian, however, lived with his mother.

"They had a huge building in northwest Düsseldorf, and he had several flats – all over the city!" Karl laughs. "He was really wild, Florian. Very unpredictable. Ralf was always super-straight, a business brain."

The difference in their backgrounds became startlingly clear when the band decamped to Florian's family estate in France, where our protagonist witnessed the aristocratic lifestyle, swanning about in southern Europe.

TELEPHONE
PULL

BAYSWATER
ROAD W2
CITY OF WESTMINSTER

"Yes, yes – exactly!" Karl nods. "It was really a piece of France, it was so big. It was situated by the sea, but nobody was there – just four, five, six houses and a mountain, opposite St Tropez. La Bastide Blanche. It was too good to be true, like a fairy tale. It still exists, and Florian's sister invites me all the time to come for the summer, but I don't want to go there again. You can't turn back the clock. It's always one direction."

Sounds lovely, though, I say. Idyllic.

"It was amazing, and if you're young and you don't think about anything, it's just fun. It was so super-cool – a different world."

Wealth isn't the only contrast that comes through Karl's telling of the story. Business nous, often a function of pre-existing privilege, was another strong point of disparity between him and his new band buddies. Ralf and Florian were aware of the brand-building exercise and ownership of said brand from the beginning.

I suggest to Karl that the Kraftwerk engineering of 1974 was to create a look that audiences would recognise – four guys in a band. And then in 1976, Kraftwerk did actually become a band, four brothers bonded by a shared life and committed to electronic music – recording, touring and socialising together. But under the bonnet in its hidden mechanics, there was a secret technology. A developing business model, owned solely by Ralf and Florian.

Karl ponders the proposition for a moment.

"Well, they signed the record deal," he says. "After they worked with Conny Plank and 'Autobahn' got successful, they said, 'Goodbye Conny'. And he was the guy who got the record deal for them.

"In the beginning, everything was very fast. The USA tour was so amazing, I was the happiest guy in the world. It was so much fun. Not money-wise, but to see America in two or three months was fascinating. And from that time on I was invited to be in the band for recordings and so on. Düsseldorf was a major place to be in Germany. We all lived there and it was just paradise."

Part of Kraftwerk's genius lay in this careful construction of the band in the wake of the success of 'Autobahn'. By bringing in Karl, they fashioned a happy confluence of their own 1960s and 1970s counterculture background with his classically nurtured musical expertise.

"It became clear I could write music as well, because I knew everything about music theory, although I was very young. Ralf and Florian had been to good schools, of course, but they were not really educated musically. Yet they had a lot of knowledge about the fine arts and the feeling of making art at that particular time."

After three electroacoustic long-players, they had thrown in their lot with electronic music. Their ability to invest would generate the conditions that allowed the Kraftwerk project to continue its experiments. Karl recounts how, following the release of 'Radio-Activity', new gear started turning up at Kling Klang, including an Allen & Heath desk, an MCI 16-track tape machine and an entirely new kind of device that would change Kraftwerk fundamentally – a Synthorama analogue step sequencer.

The trio of albums they recorded and released between 1977 and 1981, with Karl's compositional skills fully engaged, is evidence of an artistic partnership working at its peak, reaching a climax in 1981 with 'Computer World'.

The next technological step, however, would be the undoing of the classic Kraftwerk line-up.

After the triumph of the 'Computer World' album and world tour, the remainder of the 80s were not kind to Kraftwerk. Music-making technology caught up and overtook them. In response, Kling Klang embarked upon a lengthy process of studio digitisation, investing in the cutting-edge but cumbersome Synclavier system.

"I liked the term 'Man-Machine'," Karl says. "It made sense. But towards 'Electric Café', the man got lost. It was too dehumanised. As a concept, we thought Kraftwerk was a synonym for progress, like innovation. The computer was the logical next step, so we put our music into the computer to be recognised as modern, innovative and creative again. But it didn't turn out to be true."

At the same time, cycling became Ralf and Florian's new obsession, and making music slipped down their agenda. 'Electric Café' was recorded and scheduled prior to an almost neurotic era of tinkering, not helped by a bad cycling accident Ralf suffered.

'Electric Café' was cancelled and rescheduled. When it was finally released in 1986, it was not well received. Relationships within the band, already atomised, broke down. Wolfgang quit, although it looked more like he just stopped turning up to the studio, and Karl followed in August 1990.

As he's made clear, Karl hasn't got much time for today's iteration of Kraftwerk, but the catalogue he helped conjure remains one of the most important in popular music.

"The secret of our work together was that we created music in a room – it was polyphony," he says. "But the problem was that my input, and the input of Wolfgang and Emil, got absorbed into the trademark. Kraftwerk changed from an artistic collaboration into a digital business company."

Karl Bartos says he has a new project on the way, but he can't yet reveal much about it.

"I'm a little bit tired of three-minute pop music," he replies when I ask him what he's planning. "There's so much good pop music written by The Beatles and from the pre-Beatles era – it's hard to top them. You have to be very careful and think long about it. Or you put together three or four people who can be a cultural subject, like Kraftwerk was in the beginning."

And so he's returned to his own classical music training for inspiration.

"Back to Bach and the Renaissance. If you listen to Monteverdi, do me a favour and listen to 'L'Orfeo', the first opera, or other composers from the Renaissance. Some of it sounds like the music of today.

"I always like to go back into the history of music – take a little bit from here and there – to the time when Bach lived, the age of enlightenment, to when we had the first idea to decode the world into zero and one. The German polymath Leibniz came up with that idea. It opens up a completely new perspective on today's world. Some in Kraftwerk said, 'You never look back, always look ahead. If you look too much in the rear mirror, you make a crash'. But I don't think so. I think you have to look in the rear mirror once in a while, to know where you've come from."

'The Sound Of The Machine: My Life In Kraftwerk And Beyond' is published by Omnibus on 21 July

COMPUTER SAYS YES

Even for a band as restless and creative as Everything Everything, their latest album – the intriguingly titled 'Raw Data Feel' – is a huge leap forward, fusing AI-driven experiments, organic sounds and thrilling pop moments

WORDS: SHARON O'CONNELL

"We're always trying to remove the creativity from everything we do – from our artwork, videos, stage arrangements, the clothes we wear and, yes, the music. Massively."

This is an unusual mission statement, to say the least. Yet what singer and multi-instrumentalist Jonathan Higgs means is not that Everything Everything want to completely snuff out their creativity (which would, admittedly, be a strange aim for any band), but rather that they make a conscious effort to calm down their furiously busy expression.

That said, Everything Everything will never be mistaken for minimalists. Their distinctive sound reflects the positivity of Radiohead's 'Everything In Its Right Place', from which their name is lifted. It's expansive, bursting with promise and bristling with energy, as if dizzy with the technicolour rush of life itself.

Their debut album, 'Man Alive', set out their smart, art-pop stall in 2010, bagging them a Mercury nomination and a Top 20 spot. Since then, their name has become synonymous with 100-ideas-per-song maximalism, frequent time signature switches and Higgs' thoughtful lyrics, swooping falsetto and idiosyncratic scansion.

"Everyone wants to do 50 things," he says, speaking from his home in Stockport. "Everyone's got an opinion. We're too capable of manifesting our ideas. We can write these parts that just about work when they are all playing together and interlocking because we're all nerds. It doesn't always result in the best music – it's more like a performance thing. When you're a young band, that's what you're all about. Now, the thrill is how few things you can present and still have the impact."

That might suggest Everything Everything's latest long-player, 'Raw Data Feel', is a sober, more measured affair. Not a bit of it. It's full of bright, stylish, high-impact pop music that takes the temperature of our times. Beneath their bravura display, emotional, sociopolitical and existential waters have run deep over five albums. Is media overload withering our souls? Have we become lazy and complacent about social change? How did Trumpism gain traction? And what does it mean to be human in the 21st century?

Addressing weighty issues against a deceptively euphoric backdrop has long been Everything Everything's signature, and this contrast is again in play on album number six. The original idea, however, was for a set of party bangers with the usual heavy feelings parked.

Since the tour planned around 2020's 'Re-Animator' was impossible, Everything Everything went straight into working on 'Raw Data Feel' without a break. Additionally, significant life events of the last two years hit some members hard.

Given the circumstances, they all felt the need to make a different kind of record this time. The consensus was to keep things upbeat and light, although it didn't quite pan out like that.

"We've all had big stuff going on," admits Higgs. "It's been a pretty tumultuous couple of years – babies, deaths, relationships breaking down after a long time – big life changes and a lot of pandemic events as well. I think many people probably had similar experiences."

Songwriter, guitarist and producer Alex Robertshaw, who's joining the chat from Shrewsbury, is still dealing with the emotional fallout from his mother-in-law's death from cancer last year, when visitors to their extended family home were forbidden due to Covid. He talks of "a sort of slow-burning, inevitable ending" and admits 2021 was "a rough year". At the time, it moved him to write 'Leviathan', the album's sumptuous, dreamy but slightly ominous centrepiece, for which Higgs conjured the image of an unspeakable monster slithering inexorably closer.

As well as death and grief, some songs indirectly address depression, violence and suicide – not exactly party-primed material. Real life, of course, has a habit of creeping into art, but could Everything Everything ever make something without a dark undertow?

"I think we keep trying to and then we make… this," offers Robertshaw. They both laugh. "That's honestly the truth. With every album, we're like, 'We're going to make a total party record. We're going to have upbeat lyrics and we're going to go for it'. And then we do this."

More laughter. At this point in their career, the pair are clearly relaxed about the group's natural disposition. With that comes an understanding of how the cram-it-all-in approach first took hold.

"We weren't good at songwriting when we started, but we were very good at playing our instruments and overwriting and things like that," says Higgs. "All the stuff young people are good at. I think we'd just come out of the blocks excited. You've been learning your skills, you've got all this ability, and frankly you're kind of frustrated with a lot of music that's around, so you go, 'That's crap. I can do better. Look at this'. You don't want it to be show-off-ish, but it happens because you've got the guitar or whatever in your hands, and everyone has that mindset."

Robertshaw nods in agreement.

"Every member has to play the most complex thing possible, all at the same time, all the time," he says. "Everyone's looking at each other and egging each other on at that stage because it's supposedly the best thing to do."

For both musicians, the understanding that five kitchen sinks might work better in five kitchens rather than in one song has been gradually won, and it's connected to their aim of doing something different with every album. In the run-up, they ask two questions to give themselves direction: "What haven't we done yet?" and "What haven't we *succeeded* in doing?"

Robertshaw, who's built up an arsenal of modular gear, sees his task as "trying to make it so that the band and the electronics don't feel like two separate entities".

"In the last couple of years, we've been listening to a lot of electronic music, like techno or even going back to Aphex Twin's stuff," he says. "When it's at its best, I find it often has only five or six elements in the track and it sounds really loud. The problem we have as a band is that there are live drums, bass, sometimes two guitars, synths, vocals and backing vocals, and at times the sound can get very big and slightly overweight. So, for me, it was about trying to make more streamlined tracks – not everyone always playing at the same time – and integrating the songwriting with that.

"'Teletype', the first track on the record, is a very good example. There are four or five elements to it and it's very electronic. There's also a band there, but it doesn't feel like two separate things fighting against each other."

They might not have reinvented themselves with 'Raw Data Feel', but Everything Everything have made some significant changes. The songs are less determinedly dense and there are some unexpected details (slide guitar appears on a couple of tracks and a character called Kevin pops up repeatedly). More unusually, Higgs even called on AI for some help with the lyrics. Since the album was written to a tight deadline, intense labouring over tracks wasn't possible, which they reckon was for the best. It also meant much of the work was done by Robertshaw on the fly in the back of a tour bus when they played a few dates supporting Foals last year. This was a less than ideal situation.

"I'm there with my laptop on the bus, with a bunch of demos – scraps," remembers Robertshaw, almost flinching at the memory. "And I'm going hell for leather from one to the next, trying to get complete songs because we were due to go into the studio quite soon. It was actually really stressful, but Jon always says I work best like that."

"He goes into a flow state and you can't talk to him," laughs Higgs. "But when he comes out the other end, there's generally something pretty great there. Then he goes, 'I hated doing that'."

RAW DATA FEEL®
EVERYTHING
EVERYTHING
54.04 mins
Track List
[01].....Teletype - 3:41
[02].....I Want A Love Like This - 3:27
[03].....Bad Friday - 3:11
[04].....Pizza Boy - 3:32
[05].....Jennifer - 4:17
[06].....MetroLand Is Burning - 3:44
[07].....Leviathan - 5:20
[08].....Shark Week - 3:34
[09].....Cut Up! - 3:23
[10].....HEX - 2:43
[11].....My Computer - 3:06
[12].....Kevin's Car - 4:02
[13].....Born Under A Meteor - 4:00
[14].....Software Greatman - 5:59
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Pre-production is usually a much more enjoyable process for Robertshaw.

"I've got this folder of around 40 songs – some of them are complete and some are just a verse and a bridge," he says. "It's like a massive Rubik's Cube of problem-solving with loads of tracks, and you take great little germs and try to make them into full songs without losing what made them exciting in the first place. It's like, 'So I've got this one song which is a 3/4 waltz and another one which is like a hip hop thing. How can I make this work?'. There are lots of failed experiments, and a lot happens very quickly. It's great. I work like a pressure cooker and then all these songs appear."

The decision to bring machine learning on board for some of the lyrics was down to Higgs, because after five albums and a pandemic, he couldn't face another personal deep dive.

"The reality is that maybe five per cent of it is AI-generated," he explains. "We'd just put 'Re-Animator' out when we started working on this one – there wasn't the usual gap. But also I felt quite different. The changes in my life between 'Re-Animator' and 'Raw Data Feel' were huge. I guess I didn't really want to look inside and I didn't want to look outside at anything, either. Obviously I did end up talking about myself, but in such an abstract way that it feels quite safe for a change. It feels like I'm protected."

That lyrical five per cent was produced by feeding a computer programme with 'Beowulf', LinkedIn's terms and conditions, some sayings by Confucius, and the horror that is 4chan noticeboards – all Higgs' selections. He sent off this raw data to Mark Hanslip, a musician and researcher studying the relationship between systemic processes and musical outcomes, and it came back as a kind of poetry. Higgs was "very, very pleased" with the results.

"I picked out what I thought was the best from hundreds of lines. It's fascinating watching something that doesn't know what it's saying, saying stuff and applying meaning and even emotion to it. Also, it's what everyone does when they interpret any kind of art. It doesn't happen at the artist's end – it all happens for whoever's consuming it. I was consuming this nonsense and I knew exactly where it came from, but it still made me have feelings. I found it so interesting."

AI also came up with the song title 'Software Greatman', which sounds like the sort of thing that might have come from Everything Everything themselves.

"Presumably, 'software' came from LinkedIn and 'great man' must have come from 'Beowulf'," reasons Higgs. "As soon as I saw those words stuck together, I just thought, 'That's really good'. I think it said, 'What now, software great man?'."

He grins.

"I mean, for me, that's an album title."

Another new idea was to use a character called Kevin as the album's conceptual glue, although that did change. He's still in there – you don't notice him at first, though he appears four times and even gets to "own" one track ('Kevin's Car') – but he's not central to the record. We need to talk about Kevin.

"There was a stage where Jon wanted Kevin to be in every single track," chuckles Robertshaw. "I strongly encouraged him *not* to do that!"

"Yes, it wouldn't have worked in songs about serious things from our lives," concedes Higgs. "But I can throw him into songs that are more clearly about characters, even if they do get quite serious."

Who or what does "Kevin" represent?

"Obviously there's a lot of me in there, but there are other people too," explains Higgs. "And sometimes it's about what might have been, or it's personifying hope or anger or despair – lots of things. It's much easier to put it all on the back of somebody who isn't real than to have to explain yourself."

Most successful bands with longevity have at some point faced the prospect of being hogtied to their own identity. They learn to keep moving forward for their own sakes, while not abandoning the baby with the bath water. Everything Everything have been releasing music since 2008, so they know that only too well.

"I think we come up against this on every record," says Higgs. "Because there's a clear division between four guys in a band and electronic music, and we like both things. We try every which way to make that work.

"We've had fully orchestral tracks, songs that are just drum machines and beeps and boops, and we've had full-on rock-riff tracks. I don't feel we're hemmed in. We've never gone full hip hop, but it would be a bit ridiculous if we did. We've gone full pop, we've gone full rock…"

He trails off, laughing at the idea of a possible future Everything Everything.

"We haven't really gone full metal. But we don't want that."

'Raw Data Feel' is out now on Infinity Industries

VOX POP

Beyond his work with Ultravox and Visage, Billy Currie has enjoyed a long career as an artist in his own right, with 11 solo albums to his name. And it all started when he was left alone with an oscillator belonging to psychedelic warlords Hawkwind...

WORDS: JEREMY ALLEN

Billy Currie has been experiencing a much-deserved renaissance of late. His collected works as a solo musician are getting the reissue treatment, taking in 11 albums over 34 years. Next up comes 'Accidental Poetry Of The Structure', 16 years after it was first released. What was Currie up to in 2006, then?

"With a title like that, I must have been losing the plot!" he says a tad self-deprecatingly, as is his wont. The former Ultravox man's albums are appearing like revenants in reverse order, each one a snapshot of where Currie was at the time – or at least where his head was. For the record, we're currently five albums down and there are six to go, with his 1988 solo debut 'Transportation' still a way off.

Aged 72, Currie has had an eventful life so far. Born in Huddersfield in 1950, he took up the violin when he was 11 and went to music college in 1965, where he switched to viola. He was accepted into the Royal Academy Of Music in 1969, but instead of taking his place, he spent the next five years playing in various bands, joining hippy communes and having close encounters with Scientologists in East Grinstead.

During this time he developed a deep love of some of the most far-out composers who ever lived – Béla Bartók, Arnold Schönberg and electronic godfathers like Arthur Honegger and Edgard Varèse. These last two would stand him in good stead when he finally broke through with a band he helped form in 1974 – Ultravox, the classically influenced titans of 1980s synthpop, who certainly had their ups and downs over the years.

And then there have been the vicissitudes of Currie's solo career. It started well enough. In 1987, when Ultravox first broke up, he signed to Miles Copeland's IRS label. Since then, though, he's seen two of his labels go bankrupt and spent several years cutting out the music industry altogether by mailing his albums directly to those who wanted them, via the Ultravox fan club and outlets like Amazon. Through it all, Currie has kept working.

"I have to keep on writing," he shrugs. "That's just how it is. I don't enjoy it all the time but it's just something I have to do."

He considers this for a moment and then decides to correct himself. "OK, I do enjoy it."

Having had bad experiences with labels in the past, Currie has found a home he's happy with at prog and left-field specialists Burning Shed.

"They're great to deal with and they do really nice packaging," he enthuses.

The run of re-releases began with a brand new album, a collection of piano works called 'The Brushwork Oblast' in 2020. Then came the reissues of 'Doppel', 'Balletic Transcend' and 'Refine'. Which brings us to 'Accidental Poetry Of The Structure', a daring, delightful and reflective synthpop album built on intriguing ostinatos.

Many of Currie's song and album titles are based on geography – the ones that aren't long and opaque, anyway. 'Matsang River' was written in solidarity with the Tibetan people, while 'Ukraine' appeared on his vibrant, viola-driven 1992 long-player, 'Stand Up And Walk'.

"Titles are very interesting," he continues. "I've become more intrigued by words the older I've got. While I don't listen to music much now, sometimes I'll put something on for pleasure, then go on the internet and educate myself."

He was listening to John Cage and reading about tape loops when he came across the words "accidental poetry". The 'Accidental Poetry Of The Structure' album isn't built on physical tape loops, although there are plenty of loops from within the machine, and Currie even has a brief foray into drum 'n' bass on the track 'Skips Of A Chopped Head'. Ever humble, he is quick to give credit where it's due.

"My producer, Peter Dudley, helped me with that drum 'n' bass rhythm – hands up!" he says. "I'm too late in life for that kind of thing."

There's a balance between contemporary and classical throughout Currie's oeuvre, as you might expect from a classically trained pop star influenced by the likes of Schönberg, Wagner and Stockhausen. An electronic pulse streaks faintly through the piano-led 'The Brushwork Oblast', although it's an expansive, synth-enhanced collection that circumvents the need for a rhythm section. The album began with a nostalgic remembrance of the River Calder, which runs through the part of West Yorkshire where he grew up, and by the time he finished, he was considering the works of largely forgotten Russian composers like Alexander Mosolov and Sergei Protopopov.

"I went to an exhibition at the Royal Academy in 2017 called 'Revolution: Russian Art 1917 – 1932', and I was blown away," he says. "And it got me thinking that although I know Stravinsky and Shostakovich, I'd never listened to Borodin, say. So I started reading up on these figures and a lot of them had a really hard time with the Soviet regime, particularly the avant-garde composers like Mosolov and Protopopov."

Of the albums reissued so far, it's 'Accidental Poetry Of The Structure' and 2013's 'Balletic Transcend' that genuinely stand out.

"'Balletic Transcend' has a lot to do with meditation and the spiritual side of travelling," says Currie. "The feeling of ritual is very much about meditation, but it's funny as well. I never take myself too seriously – the word 'balletic' is absolutely ridiculous!"

He started writing and recording the album around the time Ultravox's definitive line-up came back together for one last hurrah, culminating in the band's 2012 long-player, 'Brilliant'.

"It got a little bit confusing there sometimes," he says. "A few of my ideas from 'Balletic Transcend' ended up getting used on 'Brilliant', and in some ways, I was reluctant to hand them over. I do regret giving up 'Satellite' because it had a lovely piano riff, whereas with Ultravox it was done on the guitar and you can't quite hear it."

Following the release of 'Brilliant' and a brief return to the album charts, Ultravox inevitably began to fall apart again. In 2016, "after 43 loyal years", Currie decided it was finally time to draw a line under it, announcing his departure on his website.

Leaving in 2016 was neither the first nor the second time William Currie had left Ultravox. The first time that everyone had had enough was 1987. From the band's initial line-up in the early 1970s, there had been, broadly speaking, two versions of Ultravox – John Foxx's incarnation were at the vanguard of technological pop, though they remained largely on the periphery, while the Midge Ure-led Ultravox achieved massive commercial success, with their singer becoming a household name, not least for his role in Live Aid and co-credits on the Band Aid charity single, 'Do They Know It's Christmas?'. But by the time they came to record 1986's 'U-Vox' album, the group were disintegrating, with long-term drummer Warren Cann already sacked.

'U-Vox' was recorded at Currie's home studio in the basement of his Notting Hill townhouse. When Ultravox disbanded, he recorded his first solo album, 'Transportation', there in 1988 (with Steve Howe from Yes on guitar), followed by his second, 1991's 'Stand Up And Walk', featuring Suzanne Bramson on vocals.

For a time, his Hot Food Studios under Chepstow Place, which he'd filled with beautiful instruments, including a Yamaha grand piano, became a fully functioning commercial recording facility, with artists like Pet Shop Boys and Dead Or Alive popping in and out.

"It was a successful business, believe it or not," says Currie. "But it's a pain to be a manager. You don't know who to trust. Everyone's trying to get free studio time."

Steve Howe, who played on most of the 'Transportation' tracks, made his own solo album 'Turbulence' there, with Currie reciprocating musically.

"My biggest mistake was not building a room within a room," he claims. "I remember Steve once cranking it up at five in the morning. I don't blame him – he's in a studio, for God's sake! – but I was three floors up and it was knocking me out of bed."

Currie looks back on those days with fondness, although he admits he was "lucky not to come out of there in a box", such were the excesses. His first marriage dissolved expensively and he found himself on the move again.These days, settled in North London with his second wife, he creates entire sonic worlds from his laptop in his garage, without any need for elaborate set-ups. That said, Currie does admit that he misses the days of shifting freight across the continent at eye-watering cost, only for the "proper wacky analogue synthesiser" to go completely out of control mid-performance.

"When Ultravox did the 'Lament' tour, I had eight synthesisers onstage, which was a bit ridiculous," he concedes. "I mean, I loved that time in a way, and I liked the challenge. You'd twiddle a knob and then go over to play that synthesiser, and people in the audience could see you weren't quite sure if it was going to produce what you were expecting. That was exciting."

Alongside his solo career, at the end of the 1980s Currie was involved with the short-lived group Humania, which he put together with his former Ultravox bandmate Robin Simon. Their failure to command attention saw him revive Ultravox in 1992 with a five-piece line-up that bore little resemblance to previous formations.

"I couldn't hack it," he reflects. "You get a lot of criticism, and I was very sensitive to people saying, 'Why don't you get a life?', and things like that. You have to be really quite tough."

The 1990s turned out to be an indifferent time for his career, with bands like Ultravox being regarded as 80s relics by music listeners at the time.

"The whole process with Ultravox was getting to me," he admits. "I didn't even go on holiday with my family because I was expected to do gigs. I was being managed by Simon Napier-Bell and Harry Cowell. They sorted things out for me from when Ultravox did 'Revelation', which ended up being a bit of a legal disaster. They managed to grab me out of that one."

Things were coming to a head, and Currie quit the band for the second time in September 1995. In a bid to escape the dread, he went on the road, fiddling with Brussels-based musician Blaine L Reininger of Tuxedomoon, for a therapeutic adventure that extended into 1996 when they played a series of dates in Germany.

"It was quite nice for my mental health, really," says Currie, before admonishing himself. "God, what are you using that term for? Very fashionable these days…"

For a while he crashed in Reininger's attic in Brussels, revelling in "une vie bohème".

"It was very artistic," he remembers. "I just loved it, and he's such a character, as is his wife. I mean, they're completely nuts. Being up there in the attic was just what I needed."

In 1996, Currie began work on what would become 'Unearthed', a fully scored neoclassical album which he performed at the Royal Geographical Society in London in 1998, although it wasn't released until three years later.

Also debuting in 2001 was 'Keys And The Fiddle' – an 18-track compilation of unreleased tracks from three different projects stretching back to 1983. It was followed by 2002's 'Push', which Currie says was "very much influenced by a period of doing tai chi". Then in 2004 came 'Still Movement', a synth album that began his 21st century Buddhism-themed works, utilising some of the equipment he first fell in love with, such as the ARP Odyssey.

As we're talking, he suddenly remembers one of the more unusual contraptions that helped kick-start his whole fascination with electronics – the oscillator. And not just any old oscillator.

"So I met these hippies…" he recalls excitedly. This was the early 1970s and Currie's band at the time, Wild Oats, would open now and again for the mighty Hawkwind.

"Vince, our tech guy, was lovely but a complete nutcase. He had a flat in Willesden, northwest London, where we used to hang out, and the guys from Hawkwind used to come and bring their oscillator. That's what they used to use on stage to make that…"

Currie emits a prolonged "Ohhh", imitating the sonic fluctuations.

"It was this ambulation just going up and down," he continues. "So Vince let me put headphones on and play around with it. I keep forgetting to mention it in interviews and it's probably one of the key moments in my musical education. I was just left alone with some headphones playing around with Hawkwind's oscillator."

Accidental poetry in waveform motion.

'Accidental Poetry Of The Structure' is out now on Burning Shed, with further reissues to follow later this year

A GNOD AND A WINK

Operating in various guises since 2006, GNOD's latest album, 'Hexen Valley', is inspired by the Yorkshire town of Hebden Bridge. It sees them channelling psych, electronics, noise, drone and even a bit of Lou Reed, to rousing effect

WORDS: MAT SMITH

"The huge amount of musical output that's come out of this project over the past 16 years is pretty mind-boggling," reflects vocalist and guitarist Paddy Shine. "When you think about the number of GNOD albums, collaborations, the solo stuff and all of the things that we've put out on our little label, Tesla Tapes, I can totally understand why some people might be like, 'Oh, I can't be arsed trying to get into any of this'."

The GNOD back catalogue is complex and rather daunting, spread across official releases, pseudonyms, odd name variations and splinter projects. Making sense of their body of work is a mammoth task. Add to this their stylistic propensity to take their sound wherever they feel like going, and it's equally hard to succinctly explain where GNOD actually fit, leaving you to conclude they belong anywhere, everywhere and nowhere simultaneously.

Their latest album, 'Hexen Valley', is a tight, psych rock masterpiece inspired by the unique atmosphere and people of Hebden Bridge, yet it comes amid various other releases from the group's members that veer between folk and industrial electronics.

Welcome to the land of GNOD. Buckle up and enjoy the trip.

Paddy Shine formed GNOD with bassist Chris Haslam in Salford in 2006. The band's initial premise was simple.

"The idea was to get together and play heavy, loud music in a non-musical way," says Shine. "We were a collection of people who met up and jammed. We thought about writing songs but then went, 'Let's not bother with that. Let's just get on stage and improvise'."

Their formative years were spent as residents at Salford's iconic Islington Mill. Originally built in the 1820s for cotton spinning, this six-storey Grade II listed structure began a new life as a multidisciplinary arts space in the late 1990s. It was a place where music and art were relatively unconstrained, where projects and collaborations could develop at their own pace.

"It meant you really got to explore all kinds of stuff, musically or with sound," enthuses Shine. "Or even just have really interesting conversations around dinner tables, about life and nothing to do with music.

"We became so steeped in the art and music scene at Islington Mill because we were there for so long. That gave us a different outlook on how things could be done. We do our own thing, which seems to work for us."

Early on, GNOD were labelled as a collective. Although both Shine and Haslam groan audibly at the tag, you can see why it stuck. They'd roll out with 15 members, giving rise to the notion of a restless, ever-changing troupe, prompting comparisons with bands like The Fall or Swans.

"We're outsiders, really," says Shine. "We're not a conventional group and we don't fit neatly into the arts thing, either. Because of the way we've always operated, we're hard to pin down, which was kind of intentional at the beginning."

Like Swans' domineering leader Michael Gira, both Shine and Haslam earned a reputation for being tough taskmasters.

"I used to take cymbals off drummers," laughs Haslam. "We'd have a drummer turn up, and I'd be like, 'Just set up your toms, kick drum and snares, and we'll give you the cymbals back in three months once you get used to playing actual drums'. I unplugged a guy's amp once. He deserved it. He was playing really loud."

"He just wasn't listening," adds Shine. "And when you're not listening, that's when you're not contributing. Often, there's not a lot going on in our music and it's quite simple, but there's a certain discipline to that kind of simplicity. I can get frustrated if somebody isn't fully committed to that. I've been known to be a bit of a twat, but I've learned to communicate a bit better now."

Although each GNOD release – and each incarnation – is different from the last, their process of developing ideas and recording is refreshingly unchanged from when they first shunned conventional songwriting in favour of improvisation. These are not messy sprawls, however. There is a honed precision to the music GNOD produce, irrespective of how it begins.

"I'm pretty good at seeing things in a structured way," offers Shine. "It's always a group effort with whoever's in the room. When you've been playing together long enough, there are these flashes of inspiration. Stuff will develop on the spot in jam sessions. Chris and I might guide the sound, because we've been a big part of that for so long but, more recently, people we've been playing with have started to show up with ideas, and we'll work on them together. There's no set plan. It's still just a bunch of people getting together in a room and having a jam."

That approach, plus their time interacting with other artists at Islington Mill, means GNOD find it easy to draw in willing collaborators. Over the years, they've recorded or performed with Faust, White Hills, BNSU (Utku Tavil and Kazeihto Seiki), percussionist João Pais Filipe, This Heat's Charles Hayward and countless others.

Haslam points to their 2021 album 'La Mort Du Sens' as an example of how their approach has evolved while still staying true to the guiding principle of spontaneity.

"We wrote these two tracks for the album – 'Pink Champagne Blues' and 'Regimental'," he says. "The rest of it came out in the studio from improvising, taking a few ideas other people had brought in and making something out of them. It's the recording process that forces things into tracks, but a lot of what we record is just what's going on at the time."

True to that notion, it's hard to believe the buzzing, noisy, vital, heavyweight guitar energy of 'Pink Champagne Blues' was conceived in a different way to the wiry shuffle and pulse of 'The Whip And The Tongue', another track on 'La Mort Du Sens'.

Talking with Shine and Haslam together during downtime after a UK and European tour, you get the impression that they might see the world in exactly the same way. Shine disagrees.

"I think that we're on completely different wavelengths," he says. "But we cross over, and that's what makes it work. Tension can push things forward. As long as you can communicate clearly, then even if everything blows up, it's what happens afterwards that's important.

"Being in a group with someone for 16 years and living in each other's pockets for that amount of time is a really great lesson in self-enquiry and communication. You learn a lot about yourself and how people react in different situations. Who needs a hug? Who needs a kick up the arse? Who needs a spliff? It's a great way to understand what triggers you and how to navigate yourself – having your friends there to remind you that you might be taking life a bit too fucking seriously."

Electronic sounds have been audible in GNOD's music from the very start of their recorded output. Every so often, as on 2015's 'Infinity Machines', they dominate the intricate sonic foreground. Elsewhere, as with 2017's insistent 'Just Say No To The Psycho Right-Wing Capitalist Fascist Industrial Death Machine', they are important reference points, weaving their way around Haslam's inventive bass riffs.

"We're ravers, man!" enthuses Shine. "We used to go out raving a lot, and we still do if there is ever an opportunity. We love electronic music and we enjoy exploring electronic equipment."

Shine and Haslam also occasionally record electronic music under the aliases Dwellings and Druss respectively, often independently but sometimes together.

"I love electronic stuff," says Haslam with a grin, while Shine nods along. "I think the difference between us is that I buy electronic gear and tend to keep hold of it for a long time, while Paddy buys gear, sells it and buys the next thing. I could never do that. He's good at picking things up, getting something out of it, sampling, then getting rid of it."

Shine talks about his love of electronic artists emerging from Africa on labels like Nyege Nyege Tapes. Some of them avoid elaborate hardware in favour of broken laptops and Fruity Loops, "where it's all vibe, vibe, vibe and they're not bothered about how fucking amazing it sounds".

KARP

The pair released their first dual record, 'GNOD Presents… Dwellings & Druss', in 2013 through Trensmat, which found them exploring a mutated form of industrial techno, not unlike something issued by Planet Mu. For Shine, the record embodies how their approach to electronic music differs.

"Chris will spend ages meticulously figuring out how to use a machine and getting really deep into it," he says. "I'm like, 'That's fucking boring, that'. My tracks on the 'Dwellings & Druss' album are sketchy-as-fuck techno – 'That sounds good, press record now!' – whereas Chris would take ages putting his things together."

Just as in GNOD, with the constantly evolving range, their distinct take on electronics underlines the solitary rule underpinning everything they do.

"There are no rules," says Shine. "That said, I do gigs with The Transcendence Orchestra. The other members are Surgeon and Daniel Bean, and they're both synth and techno wizards. I'm like, 'Any minute these guys are going to find out that I'm a fraud!'."

GNOD's new album, 'Hexen Valley', was recorded in Hebden Bridge.

"I moved from Islington Mill in the summer of 2020," explains Haslam. "I fancied a change, really. I got a spot in a housing co-op and I've been living here ever since. It's this 200-year-old, Grade II listed former tavern with a massive garden backing out onto the woods."

A West Yorkshire market town might seem like an odd place for GNOD to have decamped to when compared with industrial Salford. Shine, who divides his time between Ireland and Hebden Bridge, thinks there are more similarities than might be evident from a glance at its quaint, unspoiled topography.

"Before the industrial production thing kicked off in Manchester, it was happening in towns like this," he says. "Some of the first co-operatives in the country started here. It's got a history of doing its own thing and working outside the system."

One of GNOD's two drummers, Jesse Webb, moved into the same co-op as Haslam shortly after he arrived.

"There was also another guy living here at the time," recalls Haslam. "A guitarist called Richard Chamberlain, who played with Bridget Hayden in a band called Schisms. So I got him involved as well."

In the summer of 2021, with Shine on one of his visits from Ireland, the Hebden Bridge variant of GNOD – Haslam, Shine, Webb and Chamberlain – rented a rehearsal space-cum-studio and began jamming for the first time since the pandemic.

"We had the whole summer to write and play, but the songs appeared in one night," remembers Shine. "And we were like, 'Right, we need to just fucking strike while the iron's hot and record them'. I love it when shit like that happens and you get into a flow state. All of a sudden – boom! – you've got what you think is an album."

The group added a blistering cover of Lou Reed's 'Waves Of Fear', injecting a tremulous note of creeping dread at the very end of what is, ultimately, one of GNOD's straightest offerings. But one listen to Shine's lyrics on 'Hexen Valley' reveals something much more complex.

"Hebden Bridge has definitely got some weird shit going on," muses Shine. "There was a lot to draw on, which was good because I felt inspired to actually write lyrics rather than fucking shouting my head off about nonsense. There were a lot of themes to explore, lots of really interesting characters you might never talk to who you'd see walking around the place. There's also some dark stuff here. You could throw your shoe out of the window and you'd probably hit about 10 witches."

'Hexen Valley' marks the centre point of a typically active year for GNOD, with various spin-offs and side projects. Shine has recorded a folk-drone long-player with Cork musician Phil Masterson under the alias Moundabout. Haslam has hooked up with Dälek producer Mike Mare as Holy Scum to yield the brutal, Boyd Rice-style electronics of 'Strange Desires'. And the band's Marlene Ribeiro has an album of left-field pop tracks, 'Toquei No Sol', cued up for later this year.

The new record might be one of the group's most accessible projects to date, but seen in the context of their many and various activities, GNOD are no less enigmatic, indecipherable, refreshingly unpredictable and essential today than at any point in their 16-year existence.

"With us being the two original members, we can take GNOD wherever we want," concludes Paddy Shine.

"We're up for pushing it as far as we can," says Chris Haslam, nodding in agreement. "We always like shaking it up. We like doing different things."

'Hexen Valley' is out now on Rocket Recordings

She has played synthpop with Saloon and folk rock with The Left Outsides, but Alison Cotton's new solo album enters more experimental territory, evoking the beautifully bleak heritage of her native North East

WORDS: BOB FISCHER
PICTURES: AL OVERDRIVE

A NORTHERN SOUL

"A distant relative of mine, Helen Hughes, was a world-famous spiritualist," begins Alison Cotton. "Apparently, when she was a kid in bed, she'd be talking all the time to the 'other people' in the room. She was from Seaham in County Durham, and she helped bring about the abolition of the Witchcraft Act in the 1950s."

As a summation of an artist's ethos and inspirations, this story is difficult to beat. A sense of supernatural otherness has long since lingered over Cotton's musical explorations, both in the unearthly acid folk of The Left Outsides, a duo formed with her husband Mark Nicholas, and in a series of increasingly experimental solo albums.

The doughty harbour town of Seaham stands resolute against the wild winds and waves of the North Sea on an exposed stretch of County Durham shoreline. Once a bastion of two traditional local industries – mining and fishing – its tragic history is woven into the haunting drones of Cotton's new album, 'The Portrait You Painted Of Me'.

"Almost every year of my life I've been back in Sunderland for Christmas," she tells me, her lilting accent still proudly prominent. "But in December 2020, lockdown was called at the last minute. I suddenly had a lot of time on my hands, so I decided to spend it recording. When I picked up the viola, I immediately started thinking about the North East and I was really homesick."

It's over 25 years since Alison Cotton left her native North East, but being unexpectedly separated from the windswept landscapes of Wearside has inspired an exquisitely melancholic album, featuring funereal viola, wordless harmonies and mournful experimentation.

"I was thinking particularly about mining," she says. "I wanted to create a subterranean sound, to feel like I was going down that tunnel myself. And, as I was playing, I really felt like I was trapped. I had tears streaming down my face."

The track, 'That Tunnel Underground Seemed Neverending', perfectly captures the opaque oppression of the colliery pit.

"On my mam's side of the family, a lot of the men were miners. None are alive anymore, but when I was growing up they told me stories. My uncle died from emphysema as a result of working down the mines."

On the other side of the industrial divide, '17th November 1962' references a date ingrained into the maritime folk memory of a generation of Wearsiders. At 4.10pm on that day, the lifeboat George Elmy was launched into a howling gale to aid the crew of a stranded fishing vessel, The Economy. Five fishermen were rescued but, met with 12-foot waves at the entrance to Seaham harbour, the lifeboat capsized. Of the 10 people on board, only 32-year-old Donald Burrell survived. Among the victims was his nine-year-old son, David.

"I always remember being in Seaham when I was a kid, standing one afternoon looking out to sea with my mam," says Cotton. "And she told me that story. She's a good storyteller – so descriptive. She was a teenager living in Seaham when it happened, and it affected the whole community. The sea in the North East is so different from the sea in any other part of the country. It's so rough, so bleak. Very real."

Like many families in this part of the country, the Cottons sought salvation in the spiritual. 'The Portrait You Painted Of Me' has the spacey echo of church cloisters, and on the opening track, 'Murmurations Over The Moor', the multitracking of Cotton's voice adopts distinctly choral qualities.

"I was brought up Church of England," she says. "But I went to a Catholic School – St Anthony's in Sunderland – and I've always loved church music. I grew up listening to a lot of sacred music composers like Monteverdi, Arvo Pärt, Da Palestrina.

"My dad was a strict Methodist, and my mam is still religious. She took me to St Nicholas church in Sunderland every week, and I'd wear a robe and serve bread and wine to the congregation. But it was time to stop once I started going out on a Saturday night. It didn't feel right to do it hungover on a Sunday morning."

Her parents were both English teachers who met as students at Durham University. So was Cotton's childhood home a repository of classic literature? Were there musty Penguin books on every wall?

"There still are!" she smiles. "I loved the Brontës and Charles Dickens. Reading those books at the age of 14 really influenced the things I see when I'm playing music now. You're quite impressionable at that age, and full scenes have stayed in my head."

Her music, I suggest, shares the doomed romantic yearning of 19th century literature. 'Violet May', the only traditional lyric on the album, was inspired by a visit to Sissinghurst Castle, once home to Vita Sackville-West.

"There was something about the tower where she wrote," explains Cotton. "I was really inspired by it. But the song isn't based on her at all. Violet May is a character I created, a reclusive artist with all her work kept in that tower. It's a fairy tale. Her best friend is waiting outside, desperately wanting to see her again. She sends her letters, telling her how the garden has become completely overgrown."

The viola, then? Not an obvious instrument for someone growing up in 1980s Sunderland.

"I was seven and I wanted to play the violin," she explains. "So we had to queue up outside the school instrument cupboard. I was very shy and always at the back, and by the time I got to the front, there were only violas left. I didn't even know what they were, but I took one, and I'm so pleased that I did.

"I ended up in the school orchestra, then the local junior orchestra, then the youth orchestra. Sunderland Music Authority were brilliant – we toured France, playing in cathedrals and town halls with champagne receptions! Although I was probably drinking orange juice at the time."

Then it was back home to the Sunderland Empire for a collaboration that will leave a generation of middle-aged TV geeks consumed with jealousy.

"A performance with Tom Baker!" she laughs. "He was narrating 'The Snowman', and we were accompanying him. I remember eating chips by the stage door on a break, when Tom came over and started chatting to me and my friend, wearing his scarf and nicking chips from our bags. He was lovely and had so much time for everyone. This was probably about 1986. I've looked online, but I can't find anything about it."

Neither can I. And, bloody hell, I know my way around a fair bit of 'Doctor Who' minutiae. Can anyone help, please? Meanwhile, as those difficult teenage years progressed, Cotton found her tastes taking a turn towards the distinctly alternative.

"I started going to see bands when I was about 15," she recalls. "One of my first gigs was the Rollercoaster Tour at Whitley Bay Ice Rink – so I saw The Jesus And Mary Chain and My Bloody Valentine. That was a big part of growing up for me. I really looked up to bands, although I always thought I was too shy and lacking in confidence to ever do it myself."

Nevertheless, in her first weeks at Reading University in 1995, she played a part in the foundation of one of the 21st century's most durable indie outfits.

"I was playing in the university orchestra," she explains. "Then I saw an advert on the noticeboard looking for people to help put a band together. I thought, 'I can't be in the band, but I'd like to meet this person', because music was the most important thing in my life, and I still didn't know anyone who was into the same bands as me. It turned out to be Martin Noble, who lived in my halls, and I ended up going along to rehearsals with my viola."

Thus were heard the earliest stirrings of British Sea Power.

"We were called British Air Powers at the time," she continues. "It was just playing for a laugh at first, then Neil and Woody joined, and we entered the Battle Of The Bands at the Student Union. It was really good fun. We started playing in venues like Alleycat in Reading town centre. Then Adam and Mike from Saloon came to one of those gigs."

I interviewed Adam Cresswell from Saloon for Issue 89, I tell her. Cresswell recalled seeing her in 1997 and headhunting her to join his new band.

"I was so naive," she sighs. "I didn't realise that you could be in more than one band at a time. Everything had to so be regimented with me. I obviously don't regret being in Saloon – it was great. But I could have done both. "

Seven years making quirky synthpop is an unlikely adjunct to a musical career now infused with both austere folk tradition and sonic experimentation. In Saloon publicity pictures, Cotton looks characteristically bashful – a spectral presence at the back of gritty, monochrome shots. The band themselves perpetually hovered on the brink of commercial success. In 2002, 'Girls Are The New Boys' topped John Peel's annual Festive 50 countdown, albeit amid accusations of vote rigging that Cresswell claims ultimately broke the group's spirit. With Saloon in disarray, Cotton retreated to home life with her husband Mark, her partner since those first faltering months at Reading.

"It wasn't fun anymore," she agrees. "Although I've heard more about it since it happened than I did at the time. After Saloon split up, we started writing songs together, but I didn't think I'd ever be able to sing them live. Then Mark joined a band called The Eighteenth Day Of May, and I went to their first gig at the Freemason's Hall in London. I was totally blown away. I thought, 'OK, maybe I could actually join and just not do much!'. I went straight into recording the album, then started playing live with them. We did so much in such a short space of time. We played South By Southwest, and we supported Robyn Hitchcock and Peter Buck."

The band's self-titled 2005 album (and, sadly, their only one) is a criminally neglected folk rock classic. Metaphorically speaking, The Eighteenth Day Of May barely limped into June, although four members – including Cotton, Mark, Karl Sabino and trad folk obsessive Ben Phillipson – went on to form Trimdon Grange Explosion, a psych folk band named after a coal mining disaster in February 1882, when 74 men and boys lost their lives in a gas explosion at the Trimdon Grange Colliery. So, another musical project inspired by a Country Durham industrial tragedy?

"I hadn't even thought about that!" she exclaims. "We just wanted to carry on playing folk music together, and Ben loved the song 'The Trimdon Grange Explosion'. It was written just after the disaster by Tommy Armstrong, who was known locally as The Pitman Poet. Ben asked me if I'd like to sing it live, which was something still quite new to me."

With Trimdon Grange Explosion still a going concern and The Left Outsides preparing to record their seventh album, those confidence issues are now firmly behind her, and Cotton has become a focal point for both bands. But it's perhaps her solo work that most effectively embodies the dark otherness of her home. Those mournful, manipulated viola recitals reek of the melancholia of the North East – the desolate streets of once-thriving pit villages still struggling to find purpose in a post-coal world.

We've gone around the (red-brick, terraced) houses this afternoon and covered some decidedly dark material. Go on, I say – tell me something frothy to finish. Tell me the most un-Alison Cotton Alison Cotton fact imaginable. She smiles mischievously.

"In 2006, I joined British Sea Power again for the John Betjeman Gala at the Prince Of Wales Theatre in London," she confides. "It was an incredible, star-studded event. I did my make-up with Joanna Lumley. We were just using the mirrors in the toilets and she befriended me! Then everyone had to go on stage at the end to sing together in front of Charles and Camilla.

"There was Hugh Grant, Barry Humphries, Stephen Fry… it was amazing. Joanna was standing with Nick Cave, and I was lurking behind them, not knowing whether to join in or not. All I could see around me were celebrities. Then they turned around and beckoned me over. Joanna said, 'Come and sing with us!'. So I was in the middle of them, sharing a song sheet."

And before we say goodbye, I have to ask – is the spiritualism a family trait? Can she see "beyond the veil" as well? She laughs.

"Well, a lot of people say I'm psychic. I'll be thinking about someone and then they'll text me. It happens all the time."

She may not be imbued with the all the mediumship gifts of her illustrious ancestor, but Alison Cotton creates her own distinct brand of strange magic.

'The Portrait You Painted Of Me' is out now on Rocket Recordings

REPEAT ACTION

WORKING MEN'S CLUB

Fear Fear

HEAVENLY

Let's play Working Men's Club review bingo. The Golden Lion in Todmorden! Syd Minsky-Sargeant's "SOCIALISM" T-shirt! They were indie, now they're synthpop! Having barely scraped into their 20s, WMC are already a band with enough baggage to fill a double seat on the TransPennine Express to Manchester Victoria. And, for the full house, how about we put Manchester itself on the bingo card as well? The new Mark E Smith! Oh, come on. As long as he lives, Minsky-Sargeant will never stain enough pub ceilings to fill those particular plastic loafers.

Still, there's enough of Smith's curmudgeonly contrariness at play on 'Fear Fear' to warm the cockles of Peel obsessives. How best to kick off that high-pressure second album? With half a minute of monotone, buzzsaw synth, of course. A half-empty pint glass parked on the keyboard, and two fingers flicked through the windows of the Hebden Bridge Trades Club. Such is the uncompromising welcome afforded by opening track '19', before the hiss of utilitarian drum machines transform it into the bastard son of 'Being Boiled'. And '19'? Yes, the dreaded Covid, but also Minsky-Sargeant's age when penning this vulnerable lockdown allegory. It's nature's revenge as dark sexual encounter: "A timid dirty whisper, a flicker in the eye / She beckons as he shivers, he lunges as he cries".

The title track is similarly unyielding, a lament for the Zoom generation heralded by a cavalcade of police siren keyboards. But the band – Minsky-Sargeant plus bassist Liam Ogburn and synth/guitar players Mairead O'Connor and Hannah Cobb – are at their most potent when casting off post-punk austerity and throwing themselves into pop decadence.

'Widow' shifts the album up a gear, its earworm synths a clear tip of the trilby to Vince Clarke-era Depeche Mode. "Lust was easy until you died / Now I fuck inside my head but not outside," deadpans Minsky-Sargeant. It's a uniquely defiant breed of teenager that measures the loss of pandemic life by the reduction of leg-over opportunities, but the song is a belter. Elsewhere, and true to form, he boldly walks the line between cocky self-assurance and knowing self-mockery. "Why would thy care? / Thou must just be bluffing" he growls on the house-influenced 'Ploys' – sounding for all the world like the missing link between Frankie Knuckles and 'Last Of The Summer Wine'.

"Lyrically, the first album was mostly a personal documentation," Minsky-Sargeant has professed. "This is a blur between a personal and third-person perspective of what was going on." It's an approach nailed immaculately on 'Cut', the album's true moment of unalloyed, foot-shuffling pop. It's brilliant. Infectious. A rallying cry to rise from the rubble of a broken Britain. "All the time it's just running around my soul / Got to give it, got to take it, got to break it, got to make it", he stammers, as mellifluous guitar lines ascend around him, dragging Calder Valley gloom into tentative sunshine. It's a slicker, fuller sound than their first album, and further still from the organic rumblings of 2019 debut single 'Bad Blood'. The band, lest we forget, has undergone a complete line-up change since those early, brutal warning shots. But Arctic Monkeys producer Ross Orton has returned to hole them up in his Sheffield studio, and while the echoes of nascent Human League experiments undoubtedly linger, it's perhaps the legacy of another Steel City luminary that is felt most profoundly – Jarvis Cocker.

Although Minsky-Sargeant seems unlikely to don corduroy flares and knitted ties at any point in his career, the deadpan delivery, powerhouse synths and spiralling guitar chops certainly carry a whiff of the gritty, thwarted glamour that characterised pre-fame Pulp.

Elsewhere, the minimalist 'Heart Attack' has an irresistible disco bassline – a Calder Valley Chic, if you will – and closing track 'The Last One' is danceable, dark psychedelia with a whiff of Stone Roses. Still, it's easy for middle-aged reviewers to play Spot The Influence. Minsky-Sargeant, one imagines, cares nary a jot for such cynical indulgence, and nor should he. As half the artists mentioned above will testify, second albums can be a bugger to get right, but Working Men's Club have done everything by the book – riding a raft of praise with a record that builds and burgeons without ever losing the essential essence of… well, whatever it was that made them great in the first place.

In their case? Uncompromising northern belligerence and the undoubted promise of even greater things to come. Cross that off your bingo card and clear another seat on the next train out of Todmorden.

BOB FISCHER

MISZCZYK – PHOTO: KATE YOUNG

MISZCZYK

Thyrsis Of Etna

WE ARE TIME

MISZCZYK is a producer from Toronto and this is his debut album. It's an intriguing proposition – 16 songs, only one over three minutes, and each featuring a guest vocalist, from the mildly famous (Laetitia Sadier, The Space Lady) to the hip and obscure (Chandra Oppenheim, Vanessa Briscoe Hay). The overriding vibe is bass-heavy and downtempo, with every loop artfully degraded, at times achieving a credible fusion of Portishead and Broadcast. There are plenty of highlights, including the digidub of 'The Doorway' and the Bowie-esque ballad 'New For Old'. **JB**

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Music From Saharan WhatsApp

SAHEL SOUNDS

This compilation is curated from a series of EPs released by Sahel Sounds in 2020, and the stylistic range is fascinating. 'Tarha Ebouse Dighe Mane' by Etran De L'Aïr sets heat-hazed guitar in languid drift, while Jeich Ould Badu's 'Elyn' conjures hypnotic, crackling loops that reflect not just his own skilled musicianship, but the immediacy of the medium itself. By collecting the songs via WhatsApp from each of the artists' mobile phones, every bending note and vocal flutter feels powerfully intimate, and these tracks are a total joy to explore. **ST**

AUDIO OBSCURA

Tomorrow Will Offer Fresh Narratives

WAXING CRESCENT

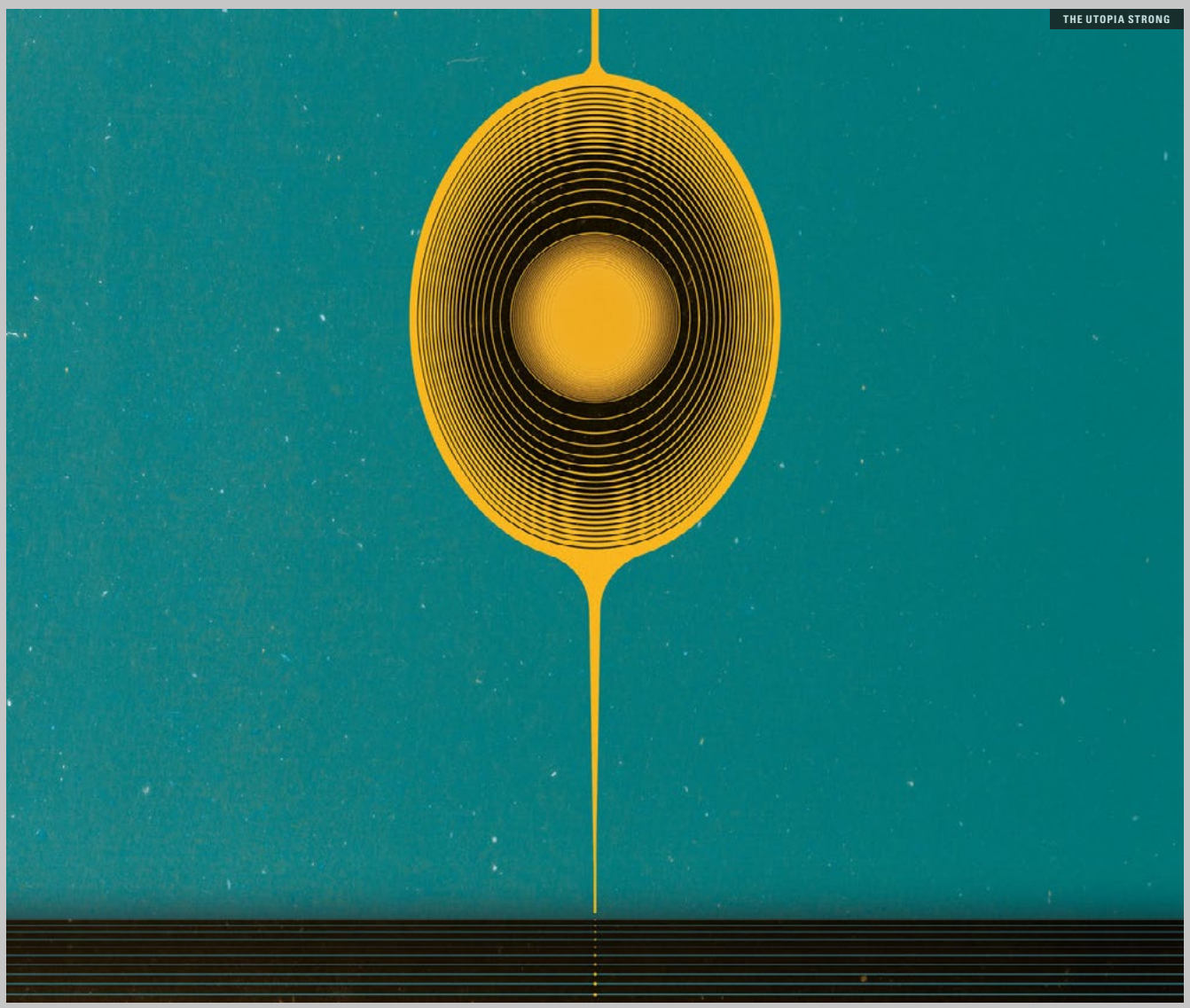
After some thought-provoking albums concerned with climate change, Norfolk-based Neil Stringfellow's recent material has become somewhat more hopeful. 'Tomorrow Will Offer Fresh Narratives' is an eclectic mix of the rhythmic and the ephemeral. The title track stands out for its off-centre sonic tapestry, 'The Black Slate' for its jazz flute and glitch amalgam, and 'Tomorrow Morning' for navigating a field of extreme reductivism. "I still believe in the music of the future," says one of Stringfellow's children on the resolute opening track. Happily, so do we. **MS**

FLOODLIGHTS

Let All The Light In

MODERN AVIATION

Keen to bolster their squad, Floodlights have brought in a rash of new signings for this, their third album. Midfield stalwarts Mat Handley, Harriet Lisa and John Alexander are joined by flamboyant Portuguese strikeforce Stellarays, who bring continental flair to 'Tomorrow And Its Tomorrows', and Swiss international Rupert Lally, who adds driving beats to 'The Last Voice You'll Hear'. But the core Floodlights ethos remains – hypnotic, organic synth melodies driven by gentle rhythms, with delicious jazz and post-rock flavourings.
A comfortable home win. **BF**



THE UTOPIA STRONG

International Treasure

ROCKET RECORDINGS

It's often noted that the second album is the most difficult, but not if you're six-time world snooker champion Steve Davis. He and psych brethren Kavus Torabi and Michael J York have avoided the sophomore slump with a record that's audaciously good. Their eponymous debut was the sound of an unlikely trio finding their feet, but 'International Treasure' expands to reveal unexpected corners of their universe. The Alice Coltrane-inspired 'Shepherdess' is all cosmic horns and mind-bending voices, while the Balearic 'Castalia' soars so high it's positively sybaritic. **JA**

LUKE VIBERT

GRIT.

HYPERCOLOUR

After 30 billion albums, Luke Vibert still has enough acerbic grit to melt any frozen innards – well-oiled electro, slippery acid, his rasping TR-909, and bits that sound like ghosts. It's Vibert, jeez, what more do you want? On the subdued funk of highlight 'Screwfix Typeface', there's strangulated acid that sounds like Josh Wink having a coughing fit. And how the mood deepens as noir synths dampen the punchy 'Gas Logs'. A bit of 'Bert can never hurt. **FR**

KL4NG

Live À Venise

STUDIO LAB'UT

French foursome Kl4ng formed when Strasbourg classical types Françoise Kubler (vocals, drums) and Armand Angster (sax and clarinet) met DJs Pablo Valentino and Yérri-Gaspar Hummel. Here, we get 13 tracks with the latter providing electronics and programmed beats. At its best, they're pretty adept at fusing the various elements effortlessly, as on 'Capricorne', where clarinet, voice and synth seem to chase each other around musically. The more vocal-led pieces, like 'Intro' and 'Ugly Weather', may land on the wrong side of the daft fence, but they're still more than interesting. **BW**

ISHMAEL ENSEMBLE

Versions Of Light

SEVERN SONGS

Bristol's experimental jazz/electronica collective Ishmael Ensemble turn in another blinder here. Featuring reworks and remixes of their acclaimed 2021 album 'Visions Of Light', 'Versions Of Light' is steeped in shimmering atmospherics, ebbing and flowing between trippy ambient hinterlands and post-dubstep vibes. Producer Medlar turns 'Soma Centre' into a hands-in-the-air banger, while Holysseus Fly truly hits the heights on 'January', as you hang on every note and nuance of her honeyed, soulful voice. Contemporary jazz, thrillingly recalibrated. **VI**

ELECTRONIC SOUND
LIVE SESSIONS /
COMING SOON

RUBBER OH

RUBBER OH
Strange Craft
ROCKET RECORDINGS

Rubber Oh is the solo project of Sam Grant, guitarist with Newcastle noise rock behemoths Pigs Pigs Pigs Pigs Pigs Pigs Pigs. Yet he's clearly a man with other musical interests, judging by the eccentric electro-glam of 'Strange Craft'. With its vocoded vocals, thuggish nursery rhyme melodies and stomping rhythms, it's like Earl Brutus meets early Eno – knowingly bombastic, but also exceedingly tuneful. 'Hyperdrive Fantasy' has a filthy bass riff against candy floss keys, while 'You'll Feel Better In The Morning' is fuzzy, retro-futuristic pop. Altogether, rather wonderful. **JB**

THE INCIDENTAL CRACK
Does Nothing
PRESTON CAPES

The Incidental Crack (Justin Watson, Rob Spencer and Simon Proffitt) "continue to not agree with or support themes for albums. It's just sounds". On the 15-minute metallic field recordings of 'The Worst Party', they scratch at the paranoiac's feeling of existential dread, while guest vocalist Dolly Dolly recites visceral surrealist verses on 'Hair' and 'Photography'. Intentionally discombobulated it may be, but 'Does Nothing' continues TIC's conceptual knack for absurdist but endearing sonics. **MS**

VLADISLAV DELAY
Isoviha
PLANET MU

After the bulldozed landscapes of his 'Rakka' albums, Finland's Vladislav Delay (Sasu Ripatti) brings us a more internalised take on excoriated ambience. Split into 13 short episodes, this electronic mould is heavy with bacterial blips. Springing pistons, stuttering glitches, a toolbox of mayhem. 'Isoteko' is a malfunctioning modem summoning the devil. Is that a mechanical dog? Or a pneumatic typewriter from the 17th layer of hell? Crikey. We've fallen inside Delay's mind and found a mechanoid Hieronymus Bosch at the controls. **FR**

WARREN "KANINEN" RASMUSSEN
Rædsel Fra Månekatten
DIFFICULT ART AND MUSIC

The lost soundtrack to the Faroe Islands' "first and only foray into late-night horror programming", anyone? It's debatable whether anyone watching the Sjónvarp Føroya channel in 1983 really did tune into 'Rædsel Fra Månekatten' (which translates to 'Terror Of The Mooncat') and lose themselves in the experimental synth score of the enigmatic Rasmussen, but despite the whole strange backstory, it's still great fun. 'En Mørk Tid' and 'Martas Skyld' are spookily sparse, and the anthemic 'Hverdagen Er Altid Den Samme' conjures up images of a subarctic Garth Marenghi. **BF**

JAMES RIGHTON

JAMES RIGHTON
Jim, I'm Still Here
DEEWEE

Career goals must be hard to set when you're already a Mercury Prize-winning new rave figurehead, which may explain why it's taken Klaxons' James Righton so long to get into the swing as a solo artist. 'Jim, I'm Still Here' is a David Dewaele-produced synthpop record that's so relaxed it's almost languorous at times, though much of that comes from Righton finally sounding comfortable in his own skin. Highlights include the Prince-inspired 'Touch', and 'Empty Rooms', a Euro-tastic ballad with ABBA's Benny Andersson. **JA**

ABOUTFACE
The Water That Glows Like Dancing Glass Cuts Crimson
BANDCAMP

Ben Kelly (aka Aboutface) travelled to the polar ice caps and recorded the sound of the landscape and its inhabitants, principally from sections that were about to succumb to global warming and disappear. That knowledge lends the UK producer's latest album a foreboding edge, but it still spans many moods. 'Coutata Couyata Save Couyata' is wise and infinite, with its Orbital-esque arpeggios and panpipes. 'We Flee Whilst The Wild Smoking Horses Swim Among Us' is more soothing, but 'As My Ice Edge Blooms' is fully forlorn. A terrifying premise, but a very human listen. **BW**

KANGDING RAY
Ultrachroma
ARA

This is a nice surprise. Like finding a rainbow in your trousers, but in a good way. Remixer to the stars Kangding Ray – Berlin-based producer David Letellier – whacks the saturation to maximum with colour-themed microdelic trance. The dark blue mood of his Raster-Noton back catalogue is vanquished, replaced on this own-label release with spikes of bright rouge electronics. The superb 'Bitter Keylime' lasers Rival Consoles-style techno into diamond-hard electro, while the atomic fractals of 'Supraverde' are all climax, all of the time. These hues are huge. **FR**

FIELD GLASS
Kin
HAPPY ROBOTS

It's like the Edwardian era never happened. Two Dickensian scientists, all sideburns and stovepipes, create a time portal to transport a miniKORG to 1862. That's brothers Dan and Jacob Mayfield, lashing up gas-powered synths to tinkly dulcimers and wheezy Victorian organs to breathe life into this glorious debut album, recorded as live in a deconsecrated Ramsgate church. 'Fulgurite' is a chiming homage to the sculpted rocks created by lightning strikes while 'Rooftops' is the sound of sinister music boxes in abandoned playrooms. There's proper alchemy at work here. **BF**

INDIAN WELLS

No One Really Listens To Oscillators

MESH

Inspired by the notion of "unfinished" architecture and our "inability to notice little things", Italian Pietro Iannuzzi's latest album (on Max Cooper's Mesh label) began when he realised that his tinkering with oscillator microtonalities would be lost on most listeners. 'Habitat' and 'Against Numbers' are two of the strongest gestures here – imagine a sweet spot between 'Kid A'-era Radiohead, Boards Of Canada and William Basinski – as Iannuzzi's emotive electronic sketches and oscillator frequencies fully take hold. An engaging album of beautiful, yet uncertain euphoria. **MS**

ISOR29

Moon Phase Gardening

SECOND CIRCLE

The enigmatic Colombian DJ and producer Tomas Garcia Station, whose 2020 incarnation as Irie Nation delivered an electrifying dose of dub, house and disco, this time turns his deft hand to a more conceptual yet still clubby piece as Isor29, themed around lunar phase gardening. Lysergic, Orb-influenced vibrations abound via Station's Korg MS-20, hang drum and some cleverly interwoven field recordings, as he journeys between the propulsive deep house of 'Genesis' and trippy, spiralling beauties like the standout 'Raga Soledad'. **CG**

MIDORI TAKADA

Cutting Branches For A Temporary Structure

WRWTFWW

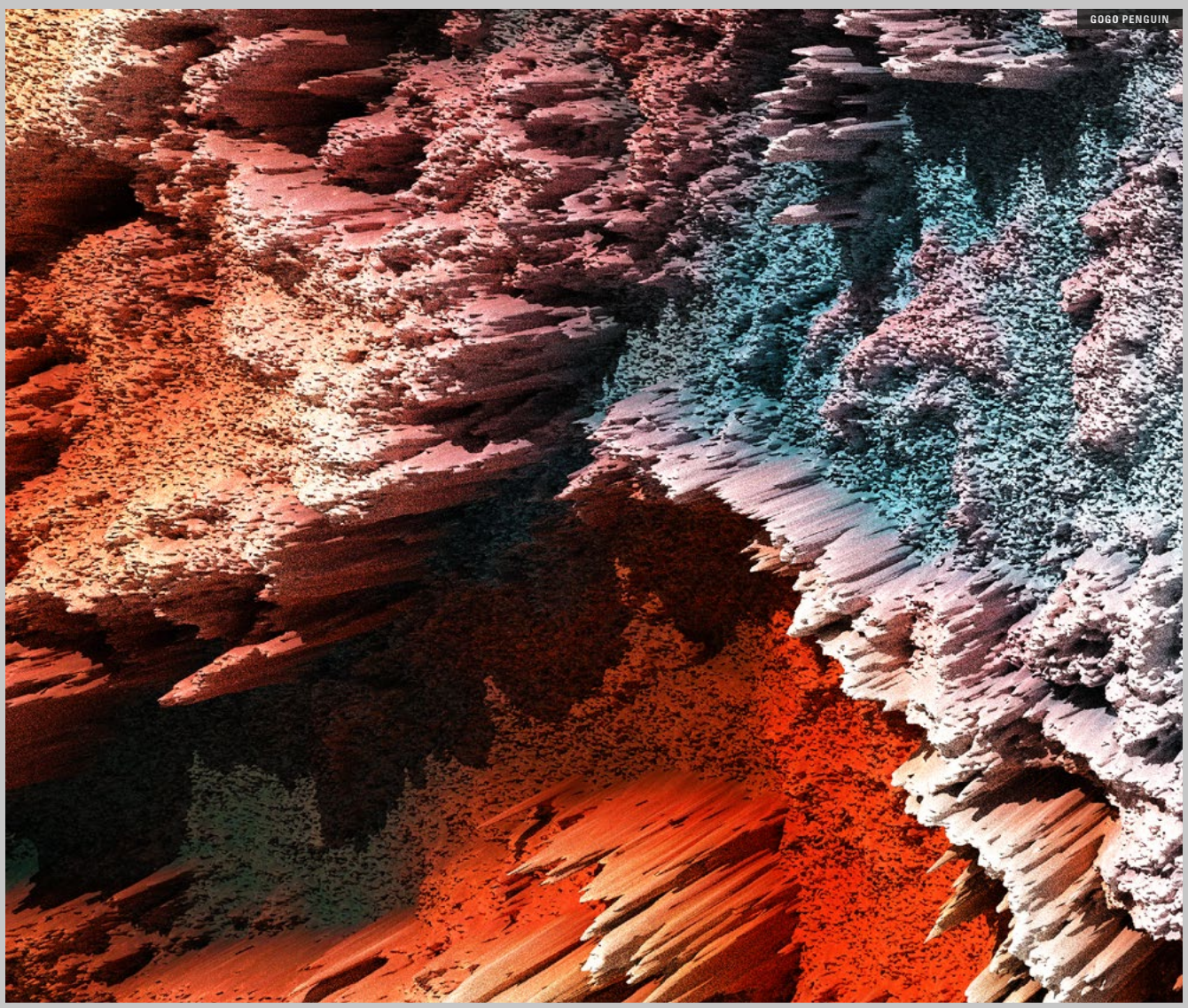
With renewed interest in several of her forgotten ambient masterpieces, Japanese percussionist Midori Takada reveals her first new album for over two decades – and it's spellbinding. Performed live across two 20-minute uncut parts, Takada reimagines the intricate polymelodies and polyrhythms of Zimbabwe's Shona music. The first half of 'Cutting Branches…' – subtitled '(In The Morning)' – is beyond beautiful, as rich, mbira-led lullabies gently weave around warm xylophone flourishes. It's as close to therapy as music gets. **ILS**

LUCIENT

Sa Casa Des Carbó

LAPSUS

Lucient is Spanish musician and DJ Mario G Quelart, and here, he taps into scintillating cosmic and Balearic vibes. Despite being enveloped in walls of echo and steeped in reverberation, his music is vivid and sharp. Named after the old fisherman's dwelling in which the record was created, the nine pieces on 'Sa Casa Des Carbó' shimmer and shine, embodying the azure Ibiza coastline on which the house rests. 'Translació' bleeds airport sonics into ethereal electronics, while 'Corb Marí' gradually pulls the ocean into evocative focus, like a slowly developing polaroid. **ST**



GOGO PENGUIN
Between Two Waves
XXIM

'Between Two Waves' is a record of firsts for Manchester's GoGo Penguin – their first release for XXIM, their first recordings with drummer Jon Scott and their first tracks to deploy synths. Those electronic interventions – on the euphoric 'Ascent' or the ravey shuffle of 'Wave Decay' – never detract from Chris Illingworth's piano or Nick Blacka's bass, but they add richness to the trio's sound. The unpredictable interplay between introspective keys and inchoate electronics on 'Lost In Thought', however, best encapsulates the expansive freshness of GoGo Penguin 2.0. **MS**

IAN DANIEL KEHOE
Yes Very So
TIN ANGEL

Imagine an alternate 1980s where a 45-year-old John Lennon strokes his grey beard, the Dakota carpets strewn with Talk Talk and Human League LPs. The resulting opus might sound a little like Toronto's Kehoe, who infuses immaculate synthpop with a delightfully Lennon-esque sneer. "Every action has a consequence / Even the ones you don't do," he snarls amid the slick beats of 'Sweet & Sour'. But Kehoe is far from indolent – this is his fifth album since 2019, and it combines instrumental nods to Yellow Magic Orchestra with wistful pop like 'Art Work Circle'. A delight. **BF**

LYNYN
Lexicon
SOOPER

Having composed for the Illinois Philharmonic Orchestra, Chicago producer Conor "Lynyn" Mackey swaps the tux for a Squarepusher T-shirt on his debut album. Sheets of icy and intricate electronics are teased with baroque tinkles and melancholic IDM, with bountiful bursts of drill 'n' bass. His compositional pedigree makes this a thoughtful listen, but also informs the ecstatic cymbals and strings of emotional highlight 'Vnar Rush'. Braindance with added brain. Worth checking out his kinetic work with label boss Nnamdï too. **FR**

PIERRE BASTIEN
Sonic Folkways
DISCREPANT

Pierre Bastien is best known as an inventor of perplexing DIY instruments made of toothbrushes, ashtrays and anything in between, but 'Sonic Folkways' is another string to his bow. The French composer gathers an array of folk instruments from around the world to map out a truly global sound. The discordant 'Aha!' brings forth a cacophony of wind instruments, sounding not unlike a crazed Jon Hassell, while 'Moor's Room' glides along a winsome wave of African percussion, circular drumming and the buzz of flying insects. Surprises are in no short supply. **ILS**

WUKAH

WUKAH
Flesh
IN THE EVENT OF CAPTURE

As Wukah, Cork-born musician Gavin Desmond blends nocturnal electronics with snatches of distant, jabbering voices to produce a subtle, almost horror movie feel. As the record progresses, however, what initially reads as cinematic terror emerges as the ominous sound of his urban experience, the sampled conversations of those affected by knife crime matching hard, post-garage beats. The wailing vocals and sharp percussion of 'Hollow Ground' prick at the conscience, while 'Last Breath' strikes an emotional gut punch from its droning textures. **ST**

WU-LU
Loggerhead
WARP

Growing up in South London, Miles Romans-Hopcraft absorbed everything from the thrash metal of Slipknot, to grime, punk, jungle and hip hop. As Wu-Lu, he meshes them all into a characterful hybrid. 'Facts' is an amalgam of scattershot drum 'n' bass snares, unearthly synth and laconic rap delivery. Elsewhere, menacing post-punk vibes abound, with the subterranean bass of 'South', featuring rapper Lex Amor, giving way to a cathartic howl of a chorus. A thrilling mix. **BM**

AMBIENT BABESTATION MELTDOWN & JBS
Who Goes There
OPTIMO

Sultry sci-fi EBM and wonky electro underpin this debut collaborative cassette release from London underground figures Ambient Babestation Meltdown and JBS, but it's the former's languid voice that steals the show. "Buddy, I think you're slime," purrs Rachael Williams on 'Dead Or Alive', her vocals coming across as a permanently raised eyebrow. The flip-side mix, 'A Sight For Men', begins with the sardonically-sampled opening line, "Men dream of women, women dream of themselves being dreamt of". A delicious sonic middle finger to the patriarchy. **CF**

PYROLATOR
Niemandsland
BUREAU B

Düsseldorf musician Kurt Dahlke has given himself the freedom to experiment more than most over the decades, making records that veer from the surreal to the slapstick. It's been 11 years since his last release as Pyrolator, and 'Niemandsland' ('No Man's Land') is something of a surprise that sees him playing it straight. Not only that, but many of the melodies are immensely, immersively beautiful. 'Djehuti' could be a serene remix of something from Daft Punk's 'Homework' while 'Acai' is redolent of Aphex Twin's more touching ambient moments. **JA**

ELECTRONIC SOUND
LIVE SESSIONS /
COMING TO A SCREEN
NEAR YOU SHORTLY

MOOR MOTHER – PHOTO: SAMANTHA ISASIAN

MOOR MOTHER
Jazz Codes
ANTI-

Jazz, but not as we know it. You'd expect nothing less from Camae Ayewa, aka Moor Mother, who makes music that collapses boundaries and emerges as something fresh and visionary. Apparently, Ayewa never sleeps – hot on the heels of her album 'Nothing To Declare' as 700 Bliss with DJ Haram, the vocalist, songwriter, rapper, poet and teacher has turned her multifaceted talents to free jazz, emerging with a "companion" album to her groundbreaking 2021 release 'Black Encyclopedia of the Air'.

'Jazz Codes' is every bit as excellent as its predecessor, revisiting the Black Quantum Futurism framework that characterises her work while underscoring her collaborative nous.

Harpist Mary Lattimore illuminates 'Umzansi' with sparkling notes that dance with spoken poetry from Ayewa and a chorus of vocalists. 'Ode To Mary' is a celebration of "free spirits, free truth", shimmering with Orion Sun's dreamy ad-libs and Jason Moran's lilting piano. And 'Real Trill Hours' pits languid R&B rhythms, smooth electronic soundscapes and autotuned voices with slick lines from LA rapper Yungmorpheus. Moor Mother rewrites the rule book, again. **CF**

CHERI KNIGHT
American Rituals
FREEDOM TO SPEND

It's strange that Cheri Knight's early electronic work is not better known. A student of music composition at Washington's Evergreen State College, she went on to work with Pauline Oliveros and eventually joined the alt-country outfit, Blood Oranges. 'American Rituals', recorded while Knight was still studying at Evergreen, is a beguiling, rhythmic collection of pieces that deserves a prominent place alongside comparable works from the late 1970s.

The album opens with 'Prime Numbers', immediately making sense of its title. Set in disorientating, incantation-like fashion, nursery rhyme lyrics roll and merge with intermittent recited digits, like John Cage arranging the 'Pinball Number Count' on Sesame Street.

Knight allows the pieces to morph in style but keeps this sense of ritual at their heart. 'Breathe' has something of Talking Heads about it, while 'Water Project #2261' sets up repeating cycles of dreamlike chimes. The rhythms could be Cage, the textures could be Arthur Russell, but the feel is entirely Cheri Knight. **ST**

NATALIA BEYLIS / ÓSCAR MASCAREÑAS / IRENE MURPHY
The Landscape Series
DIATRIBE

'The Landscape Series' from Dublin's Diatribe Records is presented as a triptych of albums, each one concerned with the natural environment and the scars of human recklessness. With her 30-minute 'Prophecy Of The Beetle', Natalia Beylis uses recordings of timber being sawn and tapped to ruminate on the devastation of woodlands. Those evocative sounds sit alongside voice memos, subtle electronica and brief glimpses of mournful piano melodies.

Featuring a sleeve image by Bridget Riley, Óscar Mascareñas' 'Burrenscapes' is a sonic exploration of County Clare's Burren region, deploying location recordings, poetry, electronics and strings to mesmeric effect.

And completing the series, Irene Murphy's 'Not Just Rivers' was created with amplified objects, field recordings and a hydrophone, resulting in fragile, watery hues of rich and nuanced detail. Heard in sequence, 'The Landscape Series' is an earnest, philosophical opportunity to eavesdrop on the world we often fail to hear. **MS**

MICHAEL DIAMOND

MICHAEL DIAMOND
Third Culture
VASUKI SOUND

This effervescent debut from talented Kerala-born, Oxford-based producer Michael Diamond marries the supreme sounds of emerging jazz saxophonist Alex Wilson with the sharpest in digital electronics.

Diamond's mixed cultural heritage provides the theme for this impressive concept piece, referencing the 'Third Culture' identity of those raised in an entirely different milieu to that of their parents. Exploring the inherent conflicts associated with spirituality and national/religious identity, Diamond employs slick tech-house, 2-step, power ambient and Detroit techno amid the brass-led introspection.

Wilson's stupendous musicianship bookends the album with real aplomb, especially on the atmospheric jazz drift of 'Genesis', before we're propelled to the dancefloor by the potent garage-y "fuck-step" of 'Exodus', which builds to a blinding, excoriating crescendo. Recommended. **CG**

HANNAH PEEL
The Midwich Cuckoos
INVADA

Hannah Peel's soundtrack to Sky TV's adaptation of John Wyndham's 1957 novel is by turns gloriously disturbing and claustrophobic. A success, in other words.

To be fair, creating a soundtrack for a story about an English village where peculiar children are born as a result of extraterrestrial intervention is surely the dream job of any electronic composer with a thimbleful of imagination. Peel has brought energy and passion to it, beautifully capturing the unusual blend of a pastoral setting, sci-fi and horror on standout tracks like 'Midwich School' and 'Seen'.

'Cuckoo' is the only traditional song format here and it's an electro-folk gem that channels the pagan spirit of 'The Wicker Man' through burbling electronica and waves of swelling reverb. Unshackled from the need for songs or rhythm, the sound design perfectly evokes and contrasts the innocent village and the eerie horror beneath its surface in ways that recall Mica Levi's astonishing 'Under The Skin' soundtrack from 2014. An eerie triumph. **AT**

PYE CORNER AUDIO
Let's Emerge!
SONIC CATHEDRAL

Following up last year's excellent 'Entangled Routes' on Ghost Box, "Head Technician" Martin Jenkins returns with 'Let's Emerge!', his first studio album for Sonic Cathedral. But anyone expecting PCA's usual dystopian electronics is in for quite a surprise, as the change of label also signals a major shift in tone.

Featuring guitarist Andy Bell (GLOK/Ride) on five of its 10 tracks, 'Let's Emerge!' is a departure to "sunnier climes", bathed in deep ambient, immersive kosmische and expansive cinematic layers. An absolute corker it is, too. The radiant, slowly unfurling psych of 'Sun Stroke' is like a soundtrack to the most epic of dawns, while 'Luminescence' comes on like prime Vangelis.

But it's the propulsive closing track, 'Warmth Of The Sun', that fully captures the essence of Jenkins' new direction, a stunning amalgam of "Beach Boys, tremolo guitars, infinite drones and Spacemen 3". From underground to overground, fully embracing the light, 'Let's Emerge!' is quite the statement from this prolific electronicist, clearly in the form of his life. Shades on. **VI**

LA TORRE IBIZA

VARIOUS ARTISTS
La Torre Ibiza – Volumen Cuatro
HOSTAL LA TORRE

The well-thumbed record box from Ibiza's Hostal La Torre gets a fourth outing. In holiday mood, we find David Morley remixing Golden Girls' 'Kinetic' in sprawling fashion, plaintive Rephlex reflections by Special Request, and a portentous soundtrack by Suzanne Ciani.

Traditional Malian guitar ends Side A with a flourish, while the corking Side C sees the soft-pedalled percussion of Pauline Anna Strom's 'Equatorial Sunrise' beautifully matched with a spacey double-whammy from The Vendetta Suite and La Torre's own resident DJ, Mark Barrott.

Closing the album is 'Estrellita', the 2009 track from John Foxx and the Cocteaus' Robin Guthrie. This piece best sums up the collection. Roomy reverb, whimsical guitars caught on the wind, and Foxx's almost monastic vocals lost in a semantic haze because all that matters is this bar, this vibe, and its Ibizan sunset. Or if you stay long enough, sunrise. All in all, a sangria-soaked delight. **FR**

OST & KJEX
Songs From The End Of The World
SNICK SNACK MUSIC

Norway has produced oodles of awesome artists over the last 20 years. Ost & Kjex – Tore Gjedrem and Petter Haavik – are up there with the best of them, so it's baffling that they're largely unknown beyond their home turf. Here's hoping that 'Songs From The End Of The World', their fourth album, does the trick.

O&K's music is organic and uplifting. Check out the YouTube clip of them performing with a million backing singers at Øya Festival a few years ago for proof. Even when they turn up the techno, as they do on this record, it all still sounds perfectly natural and positively life-affirming. Think Robert Hood at the controls of A Certain Ratio.

The first two tracks, 'Mountain Girl' and 'The Gallery', both hypnotic mech-funk cuts, are so addictive that it's hard to get past them. Once you do, you'll discover jazzy stylings and breakbeats ('She's Not From Spain'), acid splashes and bass wobbles ('Above Trees'), and lots of wonderfully oddball lyrics, which is typical of O&K. With the exception of 'Dickie's Pix', which seems a tad too dark, a touch too heavy, this album is a massive cause for celebration. And very worrying, given its title and what's going on in the world just now. **P**

THE MAGHREBAN
Connection
ZOOT

Guildford native Ayman Rostom has been making off-kilter hip hop records since the late 1990s. Once trading as Dr Zygote, he's switched aliases in more recent times as the focus has swung towards techno. And The Maghreban's techno is a strange and wonderful concoction, embracing influences from the Middle East to Detroit, with flurries of jazz layered over chopped-up synths and fractured beats, as on opening track, 'Moving'.

'Connection' is a loose conglomeration of recently created dance tracks that Rostom says complement one another with no grand narrative. "Really, it's just some deeper tracks I made that sat together well," he admits honestly and refreshingly, in the promotional blurb. And sit well together they do.

The follow-up to 2018's '01Deas' is buoyed by a number of inspired collaborations, including the contagious MIA-like 'Got Your Number' with rising Nairobi MC Nah Eeto, and several sizzling jazz-oriented jams with Soothsayers' saxophonist, Idris Rahman. **JA**

KIERAN MAHON

KIERAN MAHON
Morning Brings The Light
CASTLES IN SPACE

Based in Bexhill-on-Sea, modular synthesist Kieran Mahon has numerous Bandcamp releases to his name – but this is just his second for Castles In Space. 'Morning Brings The Light' is an immersive hour-long piece inspired by a series of pre-dawn/early morning field recordings made in the micro-world of Mahon's back garden.

If the concept sounds a little prosaic, the results are anything but, with Mahon drawing on influences as diverse as the proto-ambient Moog-scapes of Wendy Carlos, the shimmering zither of Irish experimental musician Michael O'Shea and the fingerstyle guitar of John James.

Filled with the strange transmissions of birdsong and insect chatter, Mahon creates a parallel, imaginary analogue for the teeming life in the undergrowth and air, from the tremulous drone of 'The Dark Blue Sky' and sun-dappled undulations of 'Light Through The Trees' through to the glittering arpeggios of epic finale 'You Are Here' and 'Pepe And The Rain'. By turns dazzling, hypnotic and blissful, it's a complete triumph. **JB**

BELIEF
Belief
LEX

Belief finds Stella Mozgawa, drummer of indie band Warpaint and Cate Le Bon collaborator, and American producer Boom Bip journeying far beyond their day jobs to explore 1990s rave sonics and textures. Inspired by LFO's Mark Bell, their self-titled debut explores territory that ranges from pure acid squelch ('Bayo' and 'Anx') to Orbital's skittering hi-hat anthems ('I Want To Be'), taking in 808 State and, of course, LFO.

Inspired by the past but not slavishly bound by it, 'Belief' is a joyous collision of the duo's shared obsessions – early Warp releases, drum breaks and acid house. These mutual loves were discovered when Mozgawa drummed on the tour for Boom Bip's Neon Neon project in 2013, but it's taken until now for them to unleash this monster.

One area where they do depart from the template is the use of Mozgawa's live drums on tracks like 'Jung' and 'Luther'. Weaving this percussion through gives an organic feel that adds a further dimension to the whole affair, pointing to new pathways and a great future for Belief. Believe it. **AT**

MOEBIUS
Solo Works: Kollektion 7
BUREAU B

Veteran Hamburg experimentalist Asmus Tietchens marks seven years since the passing of Cluster's Dieter Moebius – the pair were friends and collaborators – with a compilation of solo Moebius works for the Kollektion series.

Arranged in rough chronological order, the naive melody of 1983's 'Rattenwiesel' opens with a playful tone. It doesn't last. We're dragged by the wrist through frenzied calculations of distressed digital data. Jittering machinery locks into clockwork loops, evoking malfunctioning roulette wheels and, on the awesome automata of 'The Tracker', a wind-up cymbal monkey facing its own mortality.

Repetitive cycles wobble with scampering static and sonic twitches – intense, but fun. Spinning through the decades, we have two tracks ('Rast' and 'Markt') from the bedevilled toytronica of 2009's 'Kram'. And the penultiumate 'Tiefenbahnen' is inspired by Fritz Lang's 'Metropolis' as its peal of tinny bells fulcrums into rusted metallic hip hop, leaving enduring echoes of Moebius' endless creativity. **FR**

ARP

New Pleasures

MEXICAN SUMMER

Second part of 'Zebra' trilogy is pure gold

Arp, aka Alexis Georgopoulos, has been on something of an odyssey as an artist. The 48-year-old New York-based musician, composer and DJ first came to prominence in San Francisco's electro-tinged post-punk revivalists Tussle in the mid-2000s. Since then he's recorded sporadically as Arp, in between providing soundscapes for art installations and modern dance performances, working with people as varied and eminent as visual artist Tauba Auerbach and experimental avant-garde composer Anthony Moore (the latter on the collaborative 'FRKWYS Vol 3' on RVNG in 2010).

The focus of Arp's oeuvre has invariably been more ambient than in Tussle, but you can never be too certain where he might go – 2013's 'More' offered up a songbook of baroque pop ditties. That seismic shift, stylistically, looks like an anomaly though, with his love of Steve Reich and Can usually detectable somewhere within the grooves.

For his eighth album under the Arp appellation, Georgopoulos continues with his focus on textures and repetitive phrases, as has been his wont, though he takes us to unchartered territories on 'New Pleasures'. Opening track 'The Peripheral' shimmies and bends like a mirage in the desert, with strange synth noises invading the skies like exotic comets. And he explores the sonic topography of a spotless utopian city of concrete and glass, running so symbiotically it's almost sinister. The smooth, roving, Mick Karn-like bass flourishes on the marimba-enhanced 'Eniko', and the subaquatic and peculiarly monikered 'i: /o' – both played by Onyx Collective's Spencer Murphy – add smoothness to the already pristine surfaces.

'New Pleasures' is the second offering from a proposed trilogy, and it certainly feels like a progression from 2018's 'Zebra'. If that was the sound of civilisation emerging from an ambient primordial soup and developing into a pastoral musical dreamscape, then here we witness life in abundance, teeming with sounds and ideas, all polished with a sophisticated, hyperreal veneer.

It's a beautiful, absorbing, enigmatic and unique record, so where Arp can take this with the third instalment is anyone's guess. It's a mouthwatering prospect, for sure. But in the meantime, as a stand-alone album, 'New Pleasures' might just be Georgopoulos' masterpiece.

JEREMY ALLEN

Brief Encounters

Arp's Alexis Georgopoulos fends off our barrage of quick-fire questions

Where are you right now and what can you see?
"I'm on the island of Sifnos, looking out over the sea. The sun is setting, and the full moon is rising. Sounds over the top, but true."

The 'New Pleasures' album is the second part of a trilogy, following 2018's 'Zebra'. Talk us through your thinking...
"Each part emphasises a different tone, subject matter and time period. 'Zebra' was an attempt to conjure a place as though it had just been discovered – a state of newness, vibrant, full of hope, promise, possibility. For 'New Pleasures', I focused on the notion of a pleasant dystopia, where all our desires are being met. There's a darker subtext, of course… it's an inquiry into our current predicament. Sometimes with a disco beat."

Can't begin to imagine where you'll be headed for the third part...
"Does 'the wreckage of humanity' give you some idea?"

If 'New Pleasures' was a film, which one would it be?
"Good question. In 'New Pleasures', there's a collapsing of time, where the present, past and future whirr in and out of focus… perhaps a William Gibson novel with parts set in Tokyo, New York, Paris and Cameroon would be a place to start."

You've studied ethnomusicology. How does that understanding affect your recorded work?
"I've always been inclined to think about how music works within a cultural framework, what it fulfils or doesn't fulfil in society, how it's utilised. I've always found it interesting to locate genealogies – compositional techniques, for example – that connect what we tend to think of as disparate cultures."

You're based in New York. How does a place like that influence your sound?
"Sometimes my inclination is to make quiet music, a reaction to the chaos and noise. Sometimes I move towards it, get caught in its flow and want to make music that's of the city – more social and physical."

There's a Talking Heads flavour to the title track of the new record, or has that just seeped in via osmosis?
"It's always interesting to hear what people hone in on. I wasn't thinking of Talking Heads – it's more Yasuaki Shimizu and Sakamoto, even The Knife – but I was using some of the same instruments they employed on their Compass Point stuff."

There's all sorts going on here – electro, Mick Karn-style rolling bass, kosmische, minimalism, cosmic jazz. Guilty as charged?
"The ability to fold different styles into a larger picture is something I learned as a DJ – trying to get from point A to D, say, and making it feel natural even though you've moved through various styles – even incorporating some that might clash if not done the right way. So yes, I think all those things are present in some form or other. Other things as well. Not sure if guilt should be involved, though!"

Buried Treasure

HOLGER CZUKAY & ROLF DAMMERS

Canaxis

MUSIC FACTORY, 1969 (REISSUED ON SPOON, 1982 AND 1998)

I heard rumours of this album's existence – originally released privately as 'Canaxis 5' in 1969 and credited to Technical Space Composer's Crew – in the days before the internet. People spoke about it in hushed tones, but copies were as rare as hen's teeth and no one seemed to have actually heard it. Was it just a myth? Then, in the 1990s, when Can started to reissue their back catalogue, they included the retitled 'Canaxis' in a brand new cover with sleeve notes. Hallelujah! Glowing reviews followed and early champions of the record included Scanner and Paul Schütze.

Can bassist Holger Czukay recorded 'Canaxis' with technician/engineer Rolf Dammers, the album comprising two long DIY electroacoustic pieces – the title track and 'Boat-Woman-Song'. Using ethnic Asian samples culled from shortwave radio transmissions, Czukay added electronic textures to craft slow, trippy, deeply meditative passages, full of cavernous clangs, bells and gongs, sudden emergences and drops in pitch, all enmeshed in the blips and bleeps of radio frequencies.

The highly repetitive nature of the pieces gives them a drone-like quality and the fact that the voices and loops fade very slowly creates a disorientating sense of time slipping away. The pieces never really end, they just gradually fade, like a freight train being forever shunted into sidings. Listening to them is an hallucinatory, hypnotic experience.

In his 1995 book, 'Ocean Of Sound', David Toop described 'Canaxis' as being made up of "impossible musics from unknown worlds". Interestingly, Czukay's attention to the spatial quality of the music bore a strong similarity to the studio techniques being used by the dub pioneers in Jamaica, and he once referred to Lee Perry as his "spiritual brother". You can see why. Both men were mavericks who traded in the art of magick and both were as mad as a bag of squirrels. A cross between Friedrich Nietzsche and Frank Zappa, Czukay always played the clown, but he was a master craftsman. 'Canaxis' shows us that he was, in fact, a shaman.

Recorded more than 10 years before Brian Eno and David Byrne's similar and much better known 'My Life In The Bush Of Ghosts', 'Canaxis' is now acknowledged as one of the first and finest examples of what became known as ambient and world music. It is a thing of utter purity and beauty. Get hold of a copy and prepare to be transported by those impossible musics from unknown worlds.

RICHARD SKINNER

STEPHEN MALLINDER

Tick Tick Tick

DAIS

Cabs man's third solo effort is the bomb

Tick, tick, tick… boom. The Cabaret Voltaire man returns, following his 2019 solo comeback 'Um Dada'. Since then, he's partnered with LoneLady's eviscerating guitars on 'Clinker', played some pretty chunky synths for The Pop Group's Mark Stewart, and put out a fancy deluxe reissue of his 1982 debut 'Pow-Wow'. And now, solo album number three.

His premise was reportedly, "cowbell on every track, and entirely no reverb". We're pretty sure there is reverb, as the tracks have oodles of space with a looseness that, thankfully, never quite knocks things off course. And most – but not all – of the time, the cowbells have long been chewed up by some very hungry bovines. Gorgeous bristly basslines give satisfying clarity throughout, despite often getting lifted off the ground into swirls of equally rhythmic lead synth.

And oh, what rhythm. It's the leg-tapping lodestone. 'Ringdropp' underpins free-flowing Detroit claps and splashy 909 cymbals with an almost euro-house beat that punches through the mix with unbridled confidence. Obvious single 'Shock To The Body' is a stadium-sized stomp that mimics a grimacing 'Afrika Shox'. The moodier 'Hush' sounds so slumped into its butter-smooth beat, not even a perky cowbell (yes, cowbell) can nudge us out of this audio hammock. He's having a lot of fun.

It'd be great to write a linguistic analysis of Mallinder's vocals, but we want to finish this magazine before Christmas. His woozy words sound like 'Bullet'-era Fluke with a throat infection. The best moment? 'The Trial' fracturing into a flurry of stuttered, sampled utterances, like Yello battling a flea infestation.

What worked on 'Um Dada' was its ability to sound modern and yet easily sit alongside 1982's 'Pow-Wow'. While not necessarily moving things in a new direction, 'Tick Tick Tick' achieves a similar trick of taking post-punk jaggedness and smartening its collar for a Pro Tools era. The death of Richard H Kirk last year left a gaping hole for music fans looking for Cabaret Voltaire vibes in a modern era. Thank goodness Stephen Mallinder has rediscovered his solo groove in recent years. This ticks the boxes. All three of them.

FAT ROLAND

MADELEINE COCOLAS

MADELEINE COCOLAS
Spectral
ROOM40

The immersive new album from Australian minimalist composer Madeleine Cocolas arose out of the relatable act of consciously collecting the sounds around her. As our worlds all became significantly smaller through the pandemic, so it goes that our appreciation of our immediate environment increased. If recording around her Brisbane base was deliberate, the arrangements we hear on 'Spectral' were anything but.

She describes sounds gravitating toward one another of their own will, making the churning, turbulent, chaotic backdrop to Cocolas' plaintive piano motif on 'And Then I Watch It Fall Apart' all the more arresting for its unpredictability.

'Northern Storm' is one of the album's other crucial moments, breaking away from the cycles of piano and voice in favour of tight layers of ascending drones, beatific strings and a noisy, yet ultimately epiphanic conclusion. With 'Spectral', Cocolas again shows her mastery of powerfully restrained composition. **MS**

COSMIC ANALOG ENSEMBLE
Expo Botanica
HISSTOLOGY

Once you get past Stevie Wonder's 'Journey Through The Secret Life Of Plants' and Mort Garson's 1976 delight 'Mother Earth's Plantasia', it's fair to say that music soundtracks focused on plant growth have been historically niche. Nonetheless, this concept has inspired Lebanese music producer and multi-instrumentalist Charif Megarbane (under his Cosmic Analog Ensemble moniker) to create a terrific simulacrum of some cratedigger's long sought-after holy grail.

It's fantastically playful and adventurous, mirroring the unbridled arrangements of the best of library music where Moogs, funky drums, flute and choirs all coexist beautifully. From the Morricone-party arpeggios and breakbeat drums of 'Le Cinema Interieur' and the ridiculously treble-y funk of 'Ever So Slightly', to the fuzz guitar and faux-Indian trappings of 'Public Transit Limited', 'Expo Botanica' sounds like standout incidental music from a 1970s European kids TV show or an Italian spy flick. Sometimes both in the same song. Dazzling in its eclecticism, it's a triumph of creativity. **AT**

FELICIA ATKINSON
Image Language
SHELTER PRESS

French writer and avant-garde musician Felicia Atkinson begins her latest album with a long ambient piece, 'La Brume', full of gorgeously plaintive saxophone that's as captivating as a siren's call, but the rest of 'Image Language' is just as beguiling.

Atkinson's electroacoustic compositions are a stirring combination of field recordings, keyboards and MIDI instrumentation, as well as her own spoken-word vocals, woven unhurriedly through tracks like 'The House That Agnes Built'. That's Canadian-American painter Agnes Martin, who, alongside other 20th-century female artists – such as Georgia O'Keefe and Sylvia Plath – inspired Atkinson to focus on the concept of home.

Recorded between artists' residency La Becque in Switzerland and her home on the Normandy coast, 'Image Language' explores the contrast between house and landscape, interior and exterior. 'Les Dunes' crackles and hisses like a windswept shoreline, while the layered voices on 'Pieces Of Sylvia' stumble over each other, like a monologue from a French New Wave film. Beautifully cinematic throughout. **CF**

FRESH PEPPER

FRESH PEPPER
Fresh Pepper
TELEPHONE EXPLOSION

It's the small hours. Neon spills from low-rent bars onto rain-sodden pavements and silent taxis sail deserted streets. Lovelorn loners drain the dregs of smudged shot glasses. Rarely since the heyday of Tom Waits has barfly melancholy been captured so exquisitely. Not surprisingly, since saxophonist Joseph Shabason and former Deadly Snakes frontman André Ethier have poured their own experiences of manning Toronto's late-night eateries into this wonderfully evocative collection, which also features members of Beverly Glenn-Copeland's band.

The opener, 'New Ways Of Chopping Onions', sets the tone perfectly as Shabason's breathy sax floats into orange skies. 'Prep Cook In The Weeds' stirs in hints of Bob James' world-weary 1970s jazz, and 'Seahorse Tranquilizer' sees Destroyer frontman Dan Bejar joining Ethier to prop up the bar. "Every table gets a rose / Every table gets a candle," they croon, with cocktail piano and the babble of restaurant hubbub slowly fading into emptiness around them.

Pull up your collar, switch out the lights. No one's going home lonely tonight. **BF**

VARIOUS ARTISTS
Adrian Sherwood Presents
Dub No Frontiers
REAL WORLD

From King Tubby to Mad Professor, dub reggae has certainly skewed male over the years. This compilation of new tracks from On-U Sound's Adrian Sherwood flicks a finger at that patriarchy. Using their native languages, an international line-up of female musicians lay vocals on Sherwood's lightly dubby rhythms.

The rootsy Likkle Mai sings in Japanese on 'Haste Makes Waste', the genre-hopping Neyssatou adds a Tunisian flavour with 'War', and Lagos-based Temi Oyedele delivers the catchy devotional 'I Dupe (Thanks Giving)'. An enlightened inclusion is Maria Wenda, whose autotuned protest song 'Okama Werek Halok' tells of her motherland, which happens to be presided over by her husband, exiled West Papuan president Benny Wenda. When punching the patriarchy, things get political fast.

The concept is perhaps undermined by a largely male instrument section, but their music is languid and sunny. Talent includes Sly & Robbie collaborator Franklyn "Bubbler" Waul on guitar and George Oban – who recently passed away, sadly – on bass. More please, Mr Sherwood. No frontiers, no cry. **FR**

DAMARGE
1981 To 1984
EQUATION

This is wild. Every single minute of it.

'1981 To 1984' is a boxset (CD, DVD, info-packed booklet, assorted other paper goodies) detailing the history of Southend synthpunk band Damarge. Never heard of them? Oh, you're in for a treat.

It's raw and riotous stuff, worth buying for the simultaneously magnificent and dreadful version of Donna Summer's 'I Feel Love' alone. There are tons of reasons to love this collection, though. The mutant electro of 'Bodyrock', for instance, the live version of which features what must be one of the earliest examples of rapping by a UK artist. The jerky minimalism of 'The Awakening' and the gothy blast that is '20,000 Souls'. The madcap mix of a drum machine with bongos and congas. The fact that the band's bassist was called Oaf. The admirable sound quality of the material – none of it ever released until now – which has been restored after sitting in dusty attics and damp garages for almost 40 years. And all this is just for starters.

If Damarge slipped past you in the early 1980s (and unless you were living in Essex, that will be a certainty), you need to do some catching up. Never mind the bollocks that was going on in Basildon at the time, Southend was where it was really at. **P**

CATERINA BARBIERI

Spirit Exit

LIGHT-YEARS

Ascendant, far-reaching electronics

Italian composer Caterina Barbieri has an unerring knack for creating music that seems to transcend the dimensions of time and space. Armed with a modular system, a classical musical education and a multi-timbral approach to arrangement, the music she has released since arriving with 2017's 'Patterns Of Consciousness' exists in a sound world all of its own, combining slowly-evolving and vital electronic arrangements, minimalism and complexity.

Barbieri's latest album, 'Spirit Exit', is easily her most expansive collection to date. Inspired by poring over the works of female philosophers, there is a certain open-minded realism to these tracks, as if reflecting on life's inexorable journey toward the exit of the spirit. Freed from that burden of anxiety, pieces like 'Transfixed' – built up from a fragile pairing of Barbieri's voice and a harpsichord – are allowed to edge toward unpredictable conclusive statements. Almost imperceptibly and with no forcefulness, it gently unfolds, her vocal intertwined with a haunting synth melody that carries the same textural qualities as her singing, transporting us from reality to somewhere more abstract.

The album's centrepiece is 'Canticle Of Cryo', a sweeping eight-minute journey for voice, electronics and guitar that alternates between extremes of contemplative sparseness and insistent, sinewy modular arpeggios. Despite enriching her sonic palette, Barbieri's prowess with her modular rig is what repeatedly catches your attention here. The subtle development of a patch unfolding with emotion-sculpting sensitivity is an enduring thrill.

'Spirit Exit' concludes with another long piece, 'The Landscape Listens'. This is Barbieri at her most devastating. There's so much going on here, so many rapid introductions and removals of components, and such an abundance of melodies, counter-melodies and harmonic overtones that it feels like watching a time-lapse movie of the entirety of human consciousness. To create a piece of music so in tune with spirituality, environmentalism, naturalism and philosophy without veering too far into hackneyed new age territory is a rarity – for Barbieri, it is fast becoming her trademark. An essential, powerful and transformative album.

MAT SMITH

Label Profile

Label: Telephone Explosion Records
Location: Toronto, Canada
Est: 2007

Potted History: "It was my idea initially," says co-founder Jon Schouten. "Steve [Sidoli, fellow co-founder] and I play in a band together and I had the brilliant idea of self-releasing our first EP on cassette. I went over to his house with six beers and a joint and said, 'Look, you have design skills, I have business skills, let's do this together'. He's been making me look good ever since!"

Mission Statement: "We take a huge amount of pride in promoting Toronto's incredible underground communities," says Schouten. "This city is so stacked with slept-on talent, it's unreal. Everyone knows the international superstars, but the underground here is very alive. Jazz, techno, ambient, folk, experimental, pop. There's a community here for everything."

"I think we've made a point of curating our roster so that there's a really consistent vibe from release to release," adds Steve Sidoli. "Our catalogue is really diverse in terms of genre but I like to think that listeners can feel when it's a Telephone Explosion release."

Key Artists & Releases: "Asking us to pick our favourite child, eh?'," quips Schouten. "We stand by every one of our releases because that's the only way to do the damn thing. But I'm more than happy to promote what we have coming up for the second half of the year, including albums by Fresh Pepper, Badge Époque Ensemble, Jairus Sharif, Lee Paradise and more."

"I'm really proud of the Frank Hatchett double LP we released last year," says Sidoli. "It's a compilation of songs from his dance instruction records that came out in the 1970s and 80s. There's everything from disco to techno, and most of this music hasn't really been heard by anyone outside of a few niche collector circles in decades."

Future Plans: "Keeping the train on the tracks!" exclaims Schouten. "It's been a wild couple of years. I would love to take a vacation and not work 70 hours a week. Do you know anyone with property in Portugal that wants to let me live there over the winter for free? I like cats and dogs, and I'm a pretty decent cook too."

Any Other Business? "My advice for anyone thinking about starting a label would be, don't sweat the small stuff, " says Sidoli. "The inner workings of this business – especially when it comes to physical manufacturing – often leave a lot of things going less smoothly than planned. Being able to pivot and deal with snags without getting too emotionally caught up in them is key to success."

"Someone once told me, 'Never put out records you don't love as there's a good chance you'll be sitting on them for years'," says Schouten. "So we only release music that really means something to us. Also, don't be an asshole. Life's just too short."

For more, see telephoneexplosion.bandcamp.com

First And Last And Always

The Hardy Tree's **Frances Castle** on the first and last records she bought, plus her go-to album

FIRST

THE BEATLES

Meet The Beatles!

EMI/CAPITOL, 1964

"The first record I ever bought was 'Meet The Beatles!'. I got it at a jumble sale when I was at primary school. It probably cost around 20p. I still have it and it's very scratched, but I don't think it was in great condition when I got it. It's a perfect introduction to pop music. I didn't come from a musical family – it was something I had to discover for myself, and this did the job."

LAST

ALICE COLTRANE

Journey In Satchidananda

IMPULSE!, 1971

"Alice Coltrane's 'Journey In Satchidananda' is a record that I've been listening to a lot recently. I'm slowly beginning to appreciate more jazz and I guess this is a really good starting point for me. It's a mystical, psychedelic record, and I hear more things every time I hear it. I believe it was influenced by eastern religions, and this makes sense – when I listen, it feels like a whole new world of sound and rhythm is revealing itself to me."

ALWAYS

STEVE HAUSCHILDT

Where All Is Fled

KRANKY, 2015

"A lot of records had a profound effect on me when I was a student. I love it when I stumble on someone playing Jonathan Richman's 'Road Runner', for instance, but I rarely go back to purposely listen. Steve Hauschildt's 'Where All is Fled' is one record I've played more than any other over the last five years. It's the most beautiful electronic album, full of delayed arpeggios and lovely melodies that are totally hypnotic. I never get tired of it."

THE HARDY TREE

Common Grounds

CLAY PIPE

Sonic strolls though phantasmal realms

"I researched the names of the people who had lived in my flat before me, viewed old census returns from the surrounding area and noted the birth places and livelihoods of past residents," says Frances Castle of the inspiration behind this, her first Hardy Tree album since 2017. "I began to see the ghosts of these people on my walks, and notice the things they had left behind."

Since 2010, Castle's Clay Pipe label has quietly soundtracked the hidden places. It's a gentle wilderness of a catalogue, dotted with the moss-coated ruins of the abandoned, the forgotten, the overgrown. Disused railway platforms and crepuscular hamlets abound. The inaugural release? 'The Fields Lie Sleeping Underneath', Castle's debut Hardy Tree album and a lo-fi patchwork of half-remembered North London history. Twelve years on, she remains the most unobtrusive of urban potterers, peering through park railings and drifting across municipal churchyards.

The journey even starts with the creak of a rusty gate. 'A Garden Square In The Snow' is a pale winter's morning of an album opener, a soft flurry of harpsichord and frost-speckled mellotron. 'The Spire Of St Mary's' adds elegiac piano and a grief-stricken violin. And while 'Shop Fronts And Parked Cars' is the wistful intrusion of modernity, the Casio-fuelled march of 21st century hubbub, it clearly rouses the translucent remnants of Castle's beloved ghosts. Because, from here onwards, their presence is felt. A heavy presence at the album's shoulder, both chilling and comforting.

'Mist On The Playing Fields' boasts a throbbing electronic heartbeat, the lingering sugar rush of long-ago school kickabouts. And 'Face At The Window, Seafourth Crescent'? As softly uncanny as the title suggests. Keyboards dance across longwave static, a haunting memory of disturbing feelings amid the dark Victorian houses of Highbury.

'Up On The Hill' is the anthemic conclusion. A strident hymn, filled with purposeful woodwind, it pays fulsome tribute to those circling spectres. But it also celebrates the simple joys of the present, even when they are rooted in a faded, half-hidden past. Like the album as a whole, it's a good summation of the ethos behind Castle's superlative label.

BOB FISCHER

SOUND OF CERES

SOUND OF CERES
Emerald Sea
JOYFUL NOISE

Sound Of Ceres is based around the core members of K and Ryan Hover, of the band Candy Claws. Where that outfit conjured distinctive shoegazey hues out of melodic guitars and atmospheric found sound, tracks here such as 'The Tower' and 'Arm Of Golden Flame' take the aesthetic to its fullest, cinematic dreampop apex.

2016's 'Nostalgia For Infinity' found melancholy amid hazy, lo-fi slivers, but 'Emerald Sea' stretches that feeling into bombastic widescreen, narrated by famed performance artist Marina Abramovic and matching mythical lyrics with strange electronics, like a dream materialised in technicolour.

'Sunray Venus' lurches with emotive heft, the hint of something ominous twinkling just beneath the surface (imagine Mica Levi covering John Barry), while 'Handlion's Palace' could be the national anthem for a country that only exists in the mind of Terry Gilliam. In fact, the whole of 'Emerald Sea' exists in a world of its own creation, obeying its own weird rules within some discrete but completely wonderful galaxy. **ST**

ANDREW OSTLER
Rolling Like A Bullet
EXPERT SLEEPERS

This is Andrew Ostler's first foray into tape loops, and it's safe to say the Edinburgh producer has taken to looping like a duck to water. Crafted from an old Akai 4000DS Mk-II reel-to-reel recorder, a contrabass clarinet and self-developed analogue synthesiser modules, 'Rolling Like A Bullet' is a phenomenally good ambient drone album, full of slow-moving sounds and arresting textures.

Comprising two 20-minute pieces, 'Whispering' first sets in motion a hypnotic, unfurling soundscape where low woodwind tones contrast against the melodic murmur of synths. On 'Quietly', there are more enticing electronics swimming in a sea of reverb before a euphoric wave of noise brings things to a soul-cleansing climax.

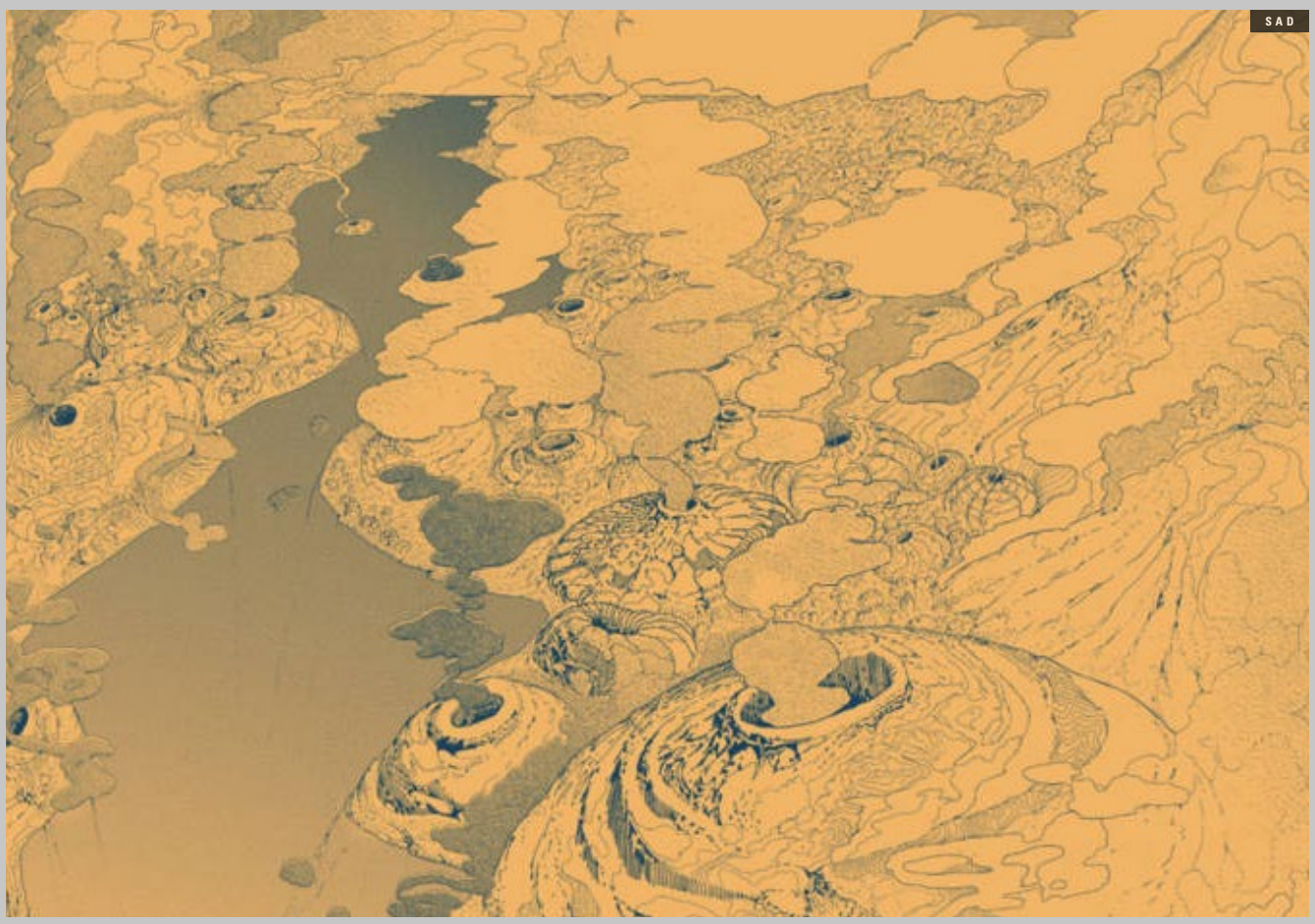
Ostler has dedicated 'Rolling Like A Bullet' "to the memory of Jon Hassell", who passed away as the album was being completed, and fans of the celebrated composer will certainly find plenty to enjoy here. **CF**

TALK TALK
The Party's Over
WARNER

Lauded as post-rock pioneers for their last two albums, Talk Talk's origins as synthpop new romantics tend to be conveniently airbrushed these days as the unlikely start of an amazing journey. But while it's not as musically audacious as those later albums, 'The Party's Over' is a great record in its own right, and remains essential for fans of Mark Hollis.

Re-released on its 40th anniversary in white and grey vinyl editions, the thumping Simmons drums and writhing fretless bass locate it firmly in 1982, but it brims with energy and an edgy soulfulness thanks to Hollis' incredible voice.

Singles 'Talk Talk' and 'Today' still sound terrific, the former enhanced by dramatic piano, the latter a rush of martial beats and chants. The title track is even better, the synthetic melancholia of its verses yielding to a powerful cascade of gothic keys in the chorus, while the sense of mystery and unresolved tension in 'Have You Heard The News?' points to the band's future. **JB**



S A D
Studia Spiritual
12TH ISLE

Seven years of S A D has really honed Vasily Stepanov and Vlad Dobrovolski's freeform approach into a sound that shuttles nonchalantly between ambient, dub, jazz and kosmische.

For 'Studia Spiritual' the duo compile five years' worth of material into one project, using a process of sampling and distorting old demagnetised tapes like a photographer shooting double exposures. Perhaps this is why their sonic cornucopia has never felt so alive. Field recordings add space, live instrumentation from flutes, bongos and sax provide muscle, and their cosmic synth solos make everything shimmer.

'Far Above The Ground' has shades of Eduard Artemyev, the mystical microtones feeling genuinely otherworldly, while 'Merging Bottoms' is an opioid psychedelic/ambient mash-up of gentle bongos, tinkling cowbells and a burbling synth. If it was human, it'd be wearing flares and a bandana. Anyone who enjoyed Bongo Joe's 'La Ola Interior' collection – featuring left-field 1980s Spanish ambient music – will love this. **ILS**

VALENTINA GONCHAROVA
Ocean: Symphony For Electric Violin And Other Instruments in 10+ Parts
HIDDEN HARMONY RECORDINGS

This criminally under-appreciated Ukrainian new age violinist takes us to places few avant-garde musicians can. Her luminous, mystically charged and folkloric compositions carry an enveloping quality that's nothing short of entrancing, and this 1988 recording, reissued with exquisite timing, is considered among her greatest.

Recorded in Estonia at the dawn of the Perestroika era when the old Iron Curtain was beginning to peel away, the classically trained, krautrock-inspired Goncharova's talent is to root her sonic journeys in the timeless textures of Eastern European tradition. It's particularly apparent in the diaphonic harmonic stylings (think Le Mystère Des Voix Bulgares) that sound so deliciously otherworldly.

The "other" instruments in this conceptual piece include electric guitar and everyday household objects, and in combination with the minimalist complexity of Goncharova's captivating electric strings, they add a transcendental, positively celestial vitality to tracks like 'Om' and 'Ocean'. Triumphant. **CG**

VARIOUS ARTISTS
Hexagonal Club Vol 3
PONT NEUF

This is the third round-up of current action on Pont Neuf, one of the key labels to watch in today's Parisian house scene. There's plenty here to reassure the lover of classic French touch, from the subtly shifting filters and bold rhythmic swagger of Berzingue's 'Splendor Box' to languid jazz-funk frills (Cosmonection's 'Orcas') and nods to the spacier end of original disco (Calmos' 'Not A Trap').

There's even one of those tracks – a la Daft Punk's 'Teachers' – that namecheck those who built the foundations of house music, in the shape of 'Tribute' by Flabaire, featuring Frank H Carter III. That said, there's also much to show the Pont Neuf crew is moving things forward.

Herr Krank's 'KlubMusik' has a slight disco shimmer and occasional old school pianos, but it's got a harder techno edge to it, too. 'Be Mine' by THEOS, meanwhile, aided by the cool soul voice of Noa Milee, has a strong US garage vibe that makes it a guaranteed floorfiller. The best of both worlds and a bridge to the future, this is well worth catching. **BW**

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Silberland: Kosmische Musik Vol 1 (1972-1986)

BUREAU B

Classic German voyages to silvery stars

Some of us live to hear the newly unearthed, freshened-up sounds of Germany's pioneering golden era of sonic invention, and anyone else hopelessly addicted will find this collection from Hamburg imprint Bureau B irresistible. Familiar names (Hans-Joachim Roedelius, Conrad Schnitzler and Faust) sit among more obscure artists such as Cologne's Phantom Band or Heiko Maile, in this definitive compendium of experimental cosmic wonder.

Beginning with the elegant, distinctly utopian early 1980s beauty 'Strahlsund' from one of those lesser known acts, Die Partei, we're carried on a thrilling journey that emphasises just how far-reaching and influential this quintessentially German progression beyond krautrock's constraining motorik remains. Kunst for Kunst's sake, as it were – cutting-edge music optimistically embracing the freeing possibilities of technological innovation.

Rolf Trostel's 'Two Faces' perfectly straddles the line between Kraftwerk's strict robotics and the Berlin School's steady, stoned exploratory languor. But the sheer breadth of the listening experience served up here becomes fully apparent on hearing another early 80s stunner from Berlin post-punk outfit Populäre Mechanik, their space-funking, dubby strut 'Scharfer Schnitt No 1' sounding ridiculously ahead of its time. But then so does hugely influential, Zodiak Arts Lab co-founder Roedelius on 'Regenmacher'. Looser and more off-kilter than his trademark keyboard sound, there's a stomping ritualistic quality at play here that's more than a surprise.

Also among the 20 unimpeachable tracks here is Tyndall's 'Großstadtgefühl', a glittering prize which shimmers and soars with gleeful futurism in the happiest of marriages between Berlin and Düsseldorf. The second half of the album pushes on further. Faust's dark-edged 'Vorsatz' is a spiralling trip-out, Riechmann's 'Weltweit' barely looks back at Earth as it rockets away, and synth maestro Harald Grosskopf's 'Emphasis' soars gravity-free, before Eno, Moebius and Roedelius gently ground us at the finish with the hypnotic 'Base & Apex'. Unmissable.

CARL GRIFFIN

GWENNO

Tresor

BELLA UNION

Stunning soundscapes to save the world

Gwenno is not your usual revolutionary. On the face of it, her records boast arrangements that are thoughtful, delicate and almost deceptively unassuming, in the same way as stylistic precursors Stereolab and Broadcast. Yet, following her second album, 2018's 'Le Kov', she has quietly inspired a whole movement of people keen to restore the Cornish language to former glories. There's clearly some steeliness beneath this ethereal facade. But what a facade.

Her third album, 'Tresor' ('Treasure'), written and recorded in St Ives and Cardiff, is a beautiful gossamer confection that just sounds fantastic. It elevates tastefulness to an artform, from the descending harpsichord riff and subdued woodwind of the title track to the bass heard throughout – a distinctive, delicious and rubbery Herbie Flowers/Serge Gainsbourg-esque bounce.

'Tresor' explores the impact of motherhood, but in examining the unique and personal, Gwenno has created something with universal impact. Highlights are numerous. 'Ardamm' ('Symbol') is a slow-burning, seven-and-a-half minute quiet epic based around a propulsive eight-note bassline that loops round and round. 'Porth La' ('St Ives') is built on a looped riff that could have been rescued from Boards Of Canada – it blossoms into a gorgeous sun-dappled creation that somehow sounds simultaneously modern and nostalgic. 'Keltek' ('Celtic'), like 'Tonnow' ('Waves'), possesses the same cold beauty as 4AD's stately This Mortal Coil. 'Kan Me' (May Song), meanwhile, written for 'Bait' director Mark Jenkin's new film 'Enys Men', nods towards the folk tradition with an electronic sheen that raises it well out of the ordinary – tonally, it's a cousin to Portishead's 'The Rip'.

'NYCAW' ('Nid Yw Cymru Ar Werth' – 'Wales Is Not For Sale') stands apart. Not only is it in Welsh rather than Cornish, but it's unusually direct in a way that's recognisable, whether you're a Welsh speaker or not. A throbbing new wave-ish guitar, reminiscent of The Cars, and minimalist drum machine provide backing as Gwenno drawls a condemnation of neoliberalism and the blind acceptance of late capitalist ideals.

Her ability, alongside co-producer and musical collaborator Rhys Edwards, to craft songs that nag at your consciousness long after the reverb has decayed remains undimmed. 'Tresor' is a sublime beauty.

ANTHONY THORNTON

REVIEWS BY
JEREMY ALLEN,
JOE BANKS,
BOB FISCHER,
CLAIRE FRANCIS,
CARL GRIFFIN,
VELIMIR ILIC,
ISAAK LEWIS-SMITH,
BEN MURPHY,
PUSH,
FAT ROLAND,
MAT SMITH,
ANTHONY THORNTON,
SPENSER TOMSON,
BEN WILLMOTT

BANGING ON

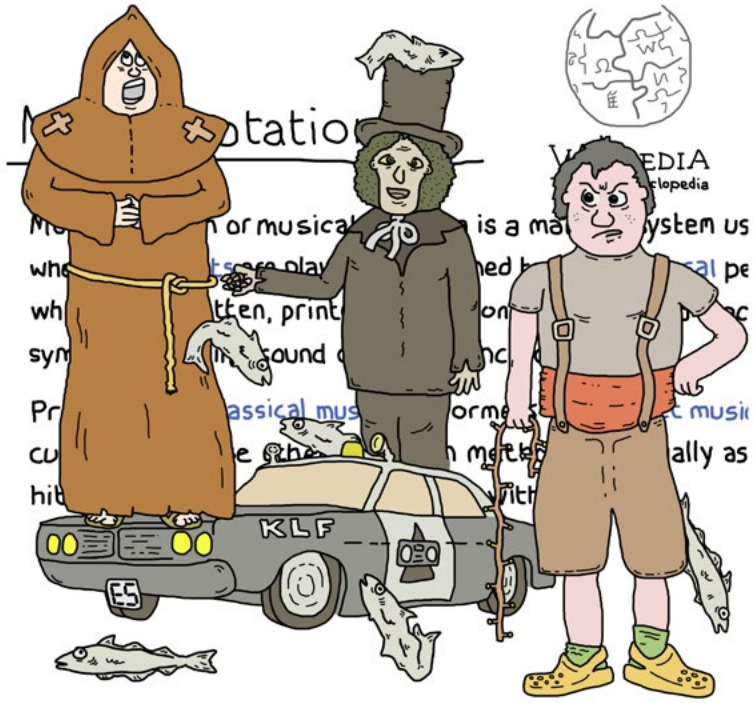
Our arse-end-of-the-mag columnist tackles the deadly serious subject of techno, techno, techno, techno

WORDS AND PICTURES: FAT ROLAND

Picture the scene. I'm at a party, loitering near the buffet table to ensure I'm in easy licking distance of the quiche. I'm dressed in my finest party outfit – cummerbund, lederhosen, green socks, crocs. Withered balloons line the walls and Alfie, whose 70th birthday celebration this is, is playing pass the parcel by himself.

I've been cornered by Boring Bertha. Her lips are greasy because she's been ploughing through the salmon vol-au-vents. She tells me she likes prog rock and trains. She has a blog all about prog rock. And trains. "Well, I bet that's a riveting read," I lie to Bertha, wishing the little fairy lights surrounding the buffet table would explode and incinerate me so I can stop talking to her.

And then it happens. Bertha asks me what kind of music I like. I sigh at the inevitability of what's about to happen. "I like techno," I mutter. Bertha's bloodshot eyes widen. She raises a glass of warm Shloer, like Rafiki holding Simba aloft, and declares, "Techno, techno, techno, techno!". She guffaws at her hilarious dramatics. Submerged in a mountain of torn wrapping paper, Alfie laughs. "Nice one, Bertha," he says.



Every single time. Every single damn time. Whenever I mention I'm into techno, someone inevitably says, "Techno, techno, techno, techno!". It's about as funny as blindfolded root canal surgery. This mantra is, of course, a reference to 'No Limit', the 1993 hit single by 2 Unlimited. The Belgian/Dutch outfit had a rapper who, in the UK, had his lines edited out and replaced with the dumb refrain, "Techno, techno, techno, techno". Ugh. I hated it. From Der Dritte Raum to Charlotte De Witte, techno has been a huge, pulsating totem of my life. Wait, that sounds disgusting. From Orbital to Joy Orbison, techno has aroused me creatively. Hmmm, that's only slightly better. How dare these europopsters reduce my beloved genre into something… fun?

Dance music should not be fun. Its most successful acts have included singing monks and glam-sampling timelords and breakdancing haddock and Dickensian drug-guzzlers. OK, maybe not the haddock. All this jollity is truly terrible. I want my dance music to be *serious*. I want to listen to The Black Dog and think, "Interesting time signature, let me read a Wikipedia page on music notation", not "I'm enjoying this and it makes me feel good". I demand anonymous bald men staring into panels of glowing LEDs while clubbers scroll TikTok to keep themselves awake. I insist on brow-furrowed women splicing tape in drab studios while not being paid enough by the BBC. Y'know, *serious*.

Boring Bertha has her hand on my lap. "I think trains are sexy," she says, while tonguing an anchovy around the inside of her mouth. Alfie is now playing musical chairs on a pouffe by himself. None of these people appreciate real techno. A series of images flash across my vision. Vengaboys and their tight lycra spacesuits. Rednex and their posse of yellow-toothed cowboys. Crazy Frog's micro-penis. "No, not like this," I bellow, shoving Bertha's face into the potato salad and, with one sweeping fist, clearing a corner of the buffet table. Sausage rolls and skewered pineapple chunks go flying. I quickly climb up onto the table and, to a bemused crowd of open-mouthed partygoers, I perform my pièce de resistance – a one-man choreographed tribute to the entire history of techno. That'll show 'em.

So that's how I got thrown out of Alfie's 70th birthday party. Apparently, Tedious Tina had made the sausage rolls specially, and she really didn't take kindly to me throwing them on the floor. I thought about describing my party-popping dance routine to you, but that would be fun to read. And we don't want any of *that*.

TOWERING ABOVE

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